

# HALLUCINOGENS

## THE FACTS



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## **THE LAW**

In Western Australia, it is against the law to possess, manufacture, supply, import or use hallucinogens. Penalties range from a \$2,000 fine and/or a two-year prison term to a \$100,000 fine and/or imprisonment for 25 years. In addition, a person convicted of a drug offence will acquire a criminal record and this can lead to difficulties in getting a job, credit or visas for overseas travel.

## **WHAT ARE HALLUCINOGENS?**

A hallucinogen is a drug or chemical capable of producing hallucinations. A hallucination is a false perception through one of the senses (for example, seeing or hearing something that is not there).

Hallucinogens can be produced naturally or synthetically. The most commonly known hallucinogen is synthetic lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) which is sold as a liquid or an absorbent tab or small square of paper. Natural hallucinogenic chemicals are found in plants such as the peyote cactus (mescaline) and some mushrooms (psilocybin).

Certain drugs such as cannabis and ecstasy may produce hallucinogenic effects at high doses or in other circumstances.

## **WHERE DO HALLUCINOGENS COME FROM?**

Lysergic acid diethylamide is the most commonly used hallucinogen in Australia. LSD was first produced in 1938 by Albert Hoffman, a Swiss chemist.

The drug is usually sold on small pieces of absorbent paper (tabs) decorated with popular designs, such as smiley faces and cartoons. It may also be sold on sugar cubes, small squares of gelatine or in capsule, tablet or liquid form.

Mescaline is native to Mexico and was used by the Mexican Indians in their religious ceremonies. Mescaline is usually dried and refined into a powder, which varies from white to brown in colour.

Psilocybin is a chemical found in mushrooms, known as magic mushrooms or golden top mushrooms, which are commonly found growing in Australia. Psilocybin may be sold as crude mushroom preparations or whole dried brown mushrooms.

## **HOW ARE HALLUCINOGENS USED?**

Lysergic acid diethylamide is usually swallowed. When swallowed, the effects start within 30 to 60 minutes and peak in three to five hours. The effects usually last for up to nine hours, but they can last for 24 hours.

Mescaline can be chewed or boiled into a liquid and drunk. Its effects last from four to six hours.

Magic mushrooms are either eaten raw, cooked, made into a drink or dried for later consumption. The effects usually last from four to six hours.

## **HOW MANY PEOPLE USE HALLUCINOGENS?**

The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey reported that 5% of Western Australians aged 14 years and over had ever used hallucinogens. Lifetime use of hallucinogens was highest among 20- to 29-year-olds (10%). In total, 1% of Western Australians aged 14 years and over had used hallucinogens in the last 12 months (4% of 20- to 29-year-olds) and less than 1% had used hallucinogens in the last four weeks.

# HEALTH EFFECTS OF USING HALLUCINOGENS

The effects of hallucinogens will vary from person to person depending on characteristics of the:

- **Individual (user)** – Mood, physical size, health, gender, previous experience with hallucinogens, expectations of the drug, personality, whether the person has had food and whether other drugs have been taken.
- **Drug** – The amount used, its purity, and the way it is taken.
- **Setting (environment)** – Whether the person is using with friends, on his/her own, in a social setting or at home, at work or before driving.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS	LONG-TERM EFFECTS
• dilation of the pupils	• flashbacks – a spontaneous and unpredictable recurrence of a prior drug experience (tripping) without taking the drug. Flashbacks may occur days, weeks or years after the drug was last taken. They can be triggered by the use of other drugs, stress, fatigue, and physical exercise or for no apparent reason.
• increase in heart rate and blood pressure	• increased risk of developing severe mental disturbances in those who have a predisposition to the condition
• increase in body temperature and sweating	• impaired memory and concentration

<b>SHORT-TERM EFFECTS</b>	<b>LONG-TERM EFFECTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• seeing things in a distorted way or seeing things that do not exist</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• tolerance to the drug</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dizziness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• psychological dependence</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• drowsiness</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• nausea</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• intense sensory experiences – bright colours, sharper sounds</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• impaired coordination and tremors</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• distorted sense of time – minutes can seem like hours</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• alterations in emotion</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• distorted sense of space</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• distorted body image</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• tension and anxiety leading to panic attacks</li></ul>	

## HALLUCINOGENS AND OTHER DRUGS

Hallucinogen users sometimes take more than one drug at the same time (polydrug use). Effects can be unpredictable when two or more different drugs are combined. Using hallucinogens with other drugs such as alcohol or amphetamines (speed) increases the risk of complications and side-effects, and can lead to a variety of serious physical and psychological problems.

## HALLUCINOGENS AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Hallucinogen use can cause anxiety, depression, paranoia and psychosis in those people who have a vulnerability to mental health problems.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Drug use can lead to social and emotional problems and can affect a user's relationship with family and friends. When users are under the influence of hallucinogens their mood can be unpredictable and/or extreme. Changes may occur depending on how they feel (for example, euphoric, sick, energetic or angry). This may lead to problems with friends and family members.

## TOLERANCE AND DEPENDENCE

Regular, heavy hallucinogen use can lead to tolerance and dependence.

- **Tolerance** - This means that a person needs more of the drug to achieve the same effects they did previously with smaller amounts. Tolerance to hallucinogens develops rapidly but is lost several days after use of the drug is ceased. Cross-tolerance (when tolerance to one type of hallucinogen makes a person tolerant to the effects of other hallucinogens) may also occur.

- **Dependence** – This means that the drug becomes central to a person’s life and they feel they cannot function properly without it.

## OVERDOSE

While there are no reported cases of fatal overdoses from hallucinogens there are still significant risks associated with the use of these drugs. When consuming hallucinogens, such as LSD, a person’s perception of reality is affected, which can lead to people placing themselves in risky situations.

However with magic mushrooms it is often difficult to distinguish between them and other more poisonous look-alikes. Some poisonous mushrooms can cause permanent liver damage or death within hours of being consumed. It is very dangerous to pick and eat wild mushrooms.

## HALLUCINOGENS AND PREGNANCY

The use of LSD and other hallucinogens seems to be linked to an increased risk of miscarriage. There may also be a higher incidence of birth defects among babies born to women using LSD.

It is recommended that women check with their doctor (or other health professional) if they are using or planning to use drugs while pregnant or breastfeeding, including prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.

## COST

The street prices of LSD, mescaline and magic mushrooms vary depending on availability, market trends and quality. The cost of purchasing hallucinogens can lead to financial problems for both occasional and regular users.



## TAKING CARE

To be safe, hallucinogen use should be avoided. However, if you use the drug or know someone who does, remember the following:

- Some people experience negative feelings when they use hallucinogens. This is known as a bad trip. If you or someone you know is experiencing a bad trip, seek help quickly. During a bad trip, the effects of hallucinogens may become so intense that they overwhelm the person's ability to cope. Sometimes the person feels like they are losing control and going crazy. Anxiety and paranoia may occur, causing panic attacks. This can lead to risky behaviours, such as running across a busy street or jumping off high places. Therefore, they should not be left alone. A bad trip can seem like it will never end. When a bad trip occurs, the person needs to be taken to a quiet place where they feel comfortable and can be reassured until the effects have passed. This may take several hours. If the person becomes uncontrollable or hysterical, medical assistance should be obtained.
- If you suspect any bad effects, call an ambulance immediately. Don't delay, you could save a life. The ambulance officers are there to help you. Be sure to describe what drug the person has taken. If the person is unconscious and you know first aid, place them in the recovery position and ensure the airway is clear. If they have stopped breathing, perform Expired Air Resuscitation (EAR). The police are not required to attend unless a death has occurred or the ambulance officers are threatened.
- Tripping when anxious, tired or feeling down will probably intensify negative feelings.

## TREATMENT PATHWAYS

There are a variety of treatment pathways available for people with hallucinogen-related problems. The drug(s) used and the availability of services as well as the user's health, desired outcome, support network and unique circumstances need to be taken into consideration. Deciding on the best treatment pathway or combination of pathways is best done in consultation with a drug and alcohol counsellor.

## MORE INFORMATION

For up-to-date information about hallucinogens or other drugs call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service or Parent Drug Information Service, or visit [www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)

### Alcohol and Drug Information Service

- Access information about drugs confidentially and quickly.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol or other drugs.
- Find out about other services.

(08) 9442 5000

1800 198 024 toll free country callers

### Parent Drug Information Service

- Drug information and support for parents and family members.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol and other drugs.
- Talk confidentially to another parent for strategies and support.
- Find out where to go for further help.

(08) 9442 5050

1800 653 203 toll free country callers

[www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)

- Access detailed information about drugs.
- Find out about the latest issues.
- Post questions and have them answered anonymously by health professionals.
- Find links to other useful sites.

*For further information about the Drug and Alcohol Office's Prevention Directorate programs, publications or resources call (08) 9370 0358 or visit [www.dao.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.dao.health.wa.gov.au)*

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or for confidential advice and counselling call the Alcohol and  
Drug Information Service 24 hour helpline  
on 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers).**