Side Effects of Ecstasy Abuse

When ecstasy is abused, there are many side effects that are normally experienced. The side effects are not uniform for all individuals but are vary according to the genetic make-up of the individual as well as the dosage of the drug that was ingested. Ecstasy (also known as MDMA) is a psychoactive drug used recreationally for its pleasant effects on the user.

It acts by causing the release of serotonin, nor epinephrine and dopamine in the brain. Serotonin is the brain chemical that is responsible for the pleasant side effects associated with ecstasy abuse.

One of the greatest potential dangers of ecstasy abuse lies in the advertent use of its street cousins such as PMA, MDA, and methamphetamine etc. PMA has been known to cause hyperthermia and is sometimes sold to unsuspecting individuals who think it is the genuine thing. The normal dosage of ecstasy would result in an overdose if the constituent compound present in the drug is PMA and not MDMA. The side effects of ecstasy abuse are even more pronounced if an overdose is taken. Some of the physiological side effects of ecstasy abuse in the case of an overdose are:

- Involuntary muscle twitching (myoclonus)
- Hyperthermia that could result in organ failure
- Rapid breathing (tachypnoea)
- Shortness of breath (dyspnea)
- Involuntary eye movements also known as nystagmus
- Damage of blood vessels also known as vasculitis
- Damage to the heart muscles (cardiotoxicity)
- Cardiogenic shock
- Pulmonary hypertension
- Acute pain in the chest (angina pectoris)
- Cardiac dysfunction and heart failure
- Brain haemorrhage that could lead to stroke
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Brain damage
- Coma/death

The psychological symptoms that accompany an overdose are:

- Confusion or disorientation of the user.
- Panic attacks, paranoia, anxiety
- Hypervigilance accompanied by a heightened awareness of the surrounding
- Impairment of the memory and cognitive functions
- Depersonalization where the user feels as if everything around them is unreal
- Disorganized thinking and thought disorders
• Acute deliriums which might be accompanied by insanity
• Full blown mania
• Delusions and hallucinations

For chronic users, the risks are considerably higher due to the long lasting effects of the drug even after quitting. 70-80% of people who are chronic abusers of the drug show signs of considerable memory impairment. This effect can also occur for people who have not used the drug for long. Cognitive impairment is also particularly marked in this group as well as the possibility of liver damage and excessive wear on the teeth.

After the initial effects of the drug wear off, the user normally experiences the after effects. Some of the physiological after effects of ecstasy abuse are:

• The user feels dizzy and lightheaded
• There is a decrease in appetite
• The user may experience gastrointestinal disturbances such as constipation or diarrhea
• There are body aches which are as a result of too much activity during the peak effects of the drug
• Sleep disturbances are sometimes experienced (insomnia)
• Extreme fatigue

The psychological after effects are:

• The user becomes paranoid and exhibits too much anxiety
• The user becomes depressed and irritable