Ayahuasca

What is ayahuasca?

Ayahuasca (pronounced ‘eye-ah-WAH-ska’) is a plant-based psychedelic. Psychedelics affect all the senses, altering a person’s thinking, sense of time and emotions. They can cause a person to hallucinate—seeing or hearing things that do not exist or are distorted.

Ayahuasca is a decoction made by prolonged heating or boiling of the Banisteriopsis caapi vine with the leaves of the Psychotria viridis shrub, although there can be a variety of other plants included in the decoction for different traditional purposes.¹ The active chemical in ayahuasca is DMT (dimethyltryptamine).¹

Ayahuasca has been used for centuries by First Nations peoples from contemporary Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador for religious ritual and therapeutic purposes.¹

Other names
Huasca, yagé, Kamarampi, Huni, brew, daime, the tea, la purga.

What does it look like?
Ayahuasca is a brown-reddish drink with a strong taste and smell.²

How is it used?
Ayahuasca is drunk as a liquid.

Other types of psychedelics
• LSD
• NBOMes
• Psilocybin
Effects of ayahuasca

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It’s important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Ayahuasca affects everyone differently, based on:

• the person’s size, weight and health
• whether the person is used to taking it
• whether other drugs are taken around the same time
• the amount taken
• the strength of the decoction.

The effects of ayahuasca are subjective, but may include:

• nausea and vomiting (induced by drinking the decoction)*
• diarrhoea*
• euphoria
• feelings of connection and unity
• introspection
• intense visual and auditory hallucinations
• experiencing powerful emotions
• anxiety
• moderate increase in blood pressure and heart rate
• increased body temperature.1, 2

*When ayahuasca is taken in a traditional or ritual setting, these effects may be perceived as cleansing or purging and a part of the spiritual or healing journey.1

Bad trips

Some people may have negative experiences taking psychedelics, or experiences they find challenging.2 This can include experiencing:

• frightening or confronting hallucinations
• intense anxiety and confusion
• fear and paranoia1

“These experiences may be understood or interpreted differently in a traditional or ritual context, where they may be seen as lessons and part of a spiritual or healing journey rather than wholly negative.

Long-term effects

Ayahuasca does not appear to have a negative impact on the body.1 Existing research indicates that long-term use of ayahuasca is not associated with a loss of cognitive functioning or negative mental health outcomes.2 4

Tolerance and dependence

Repeated use of ayahuasca does not appear to result in tolerance to the effects, and it appears to pose an extremely limited risk for dependence.5
Health and safety

There is no safe way to use psychedelic drugs, including ayahuasca.

If you do decide to take ayahuasca, it’s important to consider the following.

• It is difficult to predict the strength and effects of ayahuasca. People can have very different experiences taking the same drug on different occasions.
• People with mental health conditions or a family history of these conditions should avoid using ayahuasca.
• Sometimes other drugs may be sold claiming to be ayahuasca that aren’t.
• Taking ayahuasca in an environment and with people where you feel safe may alleviate unpleasant emotional effects.

Use of ayahuasca is likely to be more dangerous when:

• taken in combination with alcohol or other drugs, particularly stimulants such as crystal methamphetamine (‘ice’) or ecstasy
• driving or operating heavy machinery
• judgement or motor coordination is required
• alone (in case medical assistance is required)
• the person has mental health issues.
Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected: tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

Other help, support services and resources

Links to further help and support • adf.org.au/help-support/

Further information

DrugInfo • 1300 85 85 84
Free confidential information and advice about alcohol and other drugs (9am - 5pm, Mon-Fri)

Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • www.familydrughelp.com.au (Victorian-based)
Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • www.fds.org.au (Australia-wide)

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References


