

Dissociatives ●

What are dissociatives?

Dissociatives (also referred to as ‘dissociative anaesthetics’) are a class of psychedelic drug. This class of drug is characterised by distorted sensory perceptions and feelings of disconnection or detachment from the environment and self.¹ The word dissociative means detached from reality.

Types of dissociatives commonly used

Ketamine - dissociative anaesthetic that is used in surgery and veterinary medicine. It causes amnesia (memory loss) and analgesia (pain-relief). Low doses produce stimulant effects; medium to high doses produce possible out-of-body or near death experiences.²

PCP - Phencyclidine (PCP) is a drug that has both hallucinogenic and dissociative properties. The dissociative effects of PCP leaves users feeling removed from their body and their environment. This effect produces a trance-like state. It also has strong anaesthetic effects, which produces amnesia (memory loss) and analgesia (pain-relief). Also known as “angel dust”.³

DXM - (lean, dank) Dextromethorphan is a medication usually used as a cough suppressant in cold and cough medicines. It is sold in syrup, tablet, spray, and lozenge forms.⁴

Nitrous Oxide - (nangs) Nitrous oxide is a dissociative anaesthetic and has been found to produce dissociation of the mind from the body (a sense of floating), distorted perceptions and in rare cases, visual hallucination.⁵

How are they used?

Dissociatives are usually snorted, swallowed, injected intramuscularly or inhaled. The individual effects of each dissociative can vary greatly between each person using them.

Effects of dissociatives

It’s important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Dissociatives affect everyone differently, based on:

- 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 drug (varies from batch to batch).

The individual effects and toxicity of each dissociative can vary greatly between each person using them.

Many dissociatives have general depressant effects including drowsiness, slow ineffective breathing, pain relief, anesthesia, and loss of

muscle control, as well as cognitive and memory impairment. Amnesia is an often-reported side effect. Some dissociatives affect dopamine release and the opioid systems of the body and may produce euphoria.⁶

The effects of dissociatives can vary but generally speaking they are short acting, depending on the specific type of dissociative. The following may be experienced during this time:

- euphoria
- floaty
- relaxed
- happy
- pain free
- numb
- protected
- safe
- unconscious
- unaware
- in a ‘hole’
- visual or auditory hallucinations.^{6,7}

Long term effects

Large regular doses of ketamine have been found to cause 'ketamine bladder syndrome' a painful condition that requires ongoing treatment. Symptoms include difficulty holding urine and incontinence, which can cause ulceration in the bladder. It is essential that any person suffering from ketamine bladder syndrome cease using the drug and see a health professional.^{7,8}

The inhalation of nitrous oxide commonly called nangs is considered to be relatively harmless, but regular long term use can produce a deficiency of vitamin B12 which may cause nerve damage and some types of anaemia.⁷

Health and safety

There is no safe level of drug use

Use of any drug always carries some risk - even medications can produce unwanted side effects

Use of dissociatives is likely to be more dangerous when:

- taken in combination with alcohol or other drugs, in particular benzodiazepines and opiates as these can slow breathing and increase the risk of overdose
- driving or operating machinery, as a person's ability to judge distance and space is extremely limited
- used in unsafe environments such as nightclubs or festivals. There have been several reports of people hurting themselves whilst impaired and attempting to move around
- used in large doses or repeatedly. Dissociatives may be neurotoxic, meaning toxic to the nervous system
- alone (in case medical assistance is required)
- the person has a mental health problem.⁹

Nausea can happen on many dissociatives, usually directly after dosing - usually only if there are stomach contents. It is best to not eat for 3-4 hours before dosing.⁹

Find out more about overdose at adf.org.au/insights/overdose

Dependence and tolerance

There is evidence to suggest that people who use dissociatives can develop dependence and tolerance to them. Tolerance meaning people need to take larger amounts to get the same effect.

Dependence on dissociatives can be psychological, physical, or both. People who are dependent on dissociatives may find that using them becomes far more important than other activities in their life. People may crave the drug and find it very difficult to stop using it.

People who are psychologically dependent on dissociatives may find they feel an urge to use it when they are in specific surroundings or socialising with friends. Physical dependence occurs when a person's body adapts to the dissociatives and gets used to functioning with the drugs present.¹⁰

References

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4. National Institute of Drug Abuse. (2017). What are over-the-counter (OTC) medicines?
5. Brands, B, Sproule, E & Marshman, J. (1998). Drugs and Drug Abuse. Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation.
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8. Morgan, C., & Curran, H. (2011) Ketamine use: a review. *Addiction*, 107(1).
9. Trip Sit Wiki. (2019). Dissociatives

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/

Information on Nitrous oxide • adf.org.au/insights/nitrous-no-laughing-matter/

● 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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