

# Empathogens ●

## What are empathogens?

Empathogens increase an individual’s feeling of empathy and benevolence towards others and increase feelings of being socially accepted by and connected to others.<sup>1</sup> They can increase friendliness and playfulness, but can also cause mood swings, dehydration and depression.<sup>2</sup> Empathogens are sometimes referred to as entactogens.

### Empathogens and the brain

Empathogens cause the release of dopamine and serotonin in the brain. Serotonin controls mood, appetite and sleep, and can make you feel relaxed. Using empathogens can cause the serotonin levels in the brain to become very low, and can also lead to hyperthermia.

### Types of empathogens

Empathogens include:

- MDMA (ecstasy)
- MDA
- Mephedrone
- Ethylone.

### How are they used?

Empathogens such as MDMA are usually found in pill, crystal or capsule forms. They are most commonly swallowed, but can be snorted or shelved (used rectally).

## Effects of empathogens

**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.

Empathogens 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).

Generally speaking, the following may be experienced:

- feeling a sense of belonging, understanding or connection
- sexual arousal

- serotonin syndrome
- energy
- overheating
- a risk of dehydration/overhydration
- erectile dysfunction
- overdose

Find out more about overdose at [adf.org.au/insights/overdose](http://adf.org.au/insights/overdose)

### Empathogens and other drugs

Using empathogens with other drugs can be dangerous, in particular with other drugs that increase the amount of serotonin in the brain, including antidepressants, SSRIs, L-Tryptophan and other empathogens.<sup>4</sup> High levels of serotonin can lead to serotonin toxicity or serotonin syndrome. This is a serious condition with symptoms such as confusion, agitation, sweating, increased heart rate and muscle spasms, and can be fatal.<sup>5</sup>

## Health and safety

Use of empathogens is likely to be more dangerous when:

- taken in combination with alcohol or other drugs.
- driving or operating machinery as a person's ability to judge distance and space is extremely limited.
- used in an unsafe environment. It is best to use in a safe environment where you feel comfortable and with people you trust.
- used in large doses or repeatedly.
- alone (in case medical assistance is required). It is recommended that a person unaffected be at hand in case assistance is required.
- engaged in vigorous or energetic activities such as dancing.
- the person has a mental health problem.<sup>6</sup>

Often drugs sold as ecstasy may not contain any methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA); they can be a mix of amphetamine, paramethoxyamphetamine (PMA), ketamine, NBOMe, methylone or other substances.

## Dependence and tolerance

Regular use of empathogens can decrease the potency of the drug on your body, which may lead to you wanting to consume larger amounts. Using empathogens on a regular basis may mean that you are releasing and depleting serotonin before it has had a chance to build back up. Experiencing low serotonin levels can lead to depression and depressive symptoms.<sup>7</sup>

#### References

1. EMCDD, 2018, 'Brief Glossary of Terms : Empathogen' EMCDD, 2018
2. MDMA: Empathogen or love potion? (2010, December 29). Biotech Week, 741
3. The Drugs Wheel. (n.d.) Drugs and the Brain
4. NPS Medicinewise. (2003). Serotonin syndrome
5. Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies Ltd. (n.d.) Stimulants and SSRIs
6. Harm Reduction Victoria. (n.d.) MDMA/'Ecstasy'
7. Drugs and Me. (2018). MDMA.

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/](http://adf.org.au/help-support/)

Information on empathogens • [adf.org.au/drug-facts/empathogens/](http://adf.org.au/drug-facts/empathogens/)

#### ● 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](http://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](http://www.fds.org.au)** (Australia-wide)



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