

Hallucinogen Abuse and Dependence

What is hallucinogen abuse and dependence?

Hallucinogens are drugs that cause you to see, hear, and feel things that are not real. Some of these drugs cause intense mood swings that can lead to violence or suicide.

There are many plant and man-made hallucinogens. Some of the more common hallucinogens include:

- LSD, which is made from a chemical found in a fungus found on rye and other grains
- Peyote, which is from a cactus found in northern Mexico and southwest United States. The main ingredient is mescaline, which can also be man-made.
- Psilocybin, which is found in certain types of mushrooms from South America, Mexico and the United States
- PCP, which is a man made drug

Abuse and dependence are patterns of using drugs that lead to serious personal, family and health problems. Abuse is when you keep taking the drug even though it causes problems such as:

- Showing up late or missing work or school and not caring about things that used to matter to you
- Breaking rules or breaking the law
- Not keeping promises, arguing, or even getting violent with other people
- Doing things that are dangerous, such as driving while under the influence

If you continue to abuse drugs, you can become dependent. When you are dependent, you:

- Need to use more and more of the drug or use it more often to get the same effects
- Lose control, which means you keep using drugs even though you know that it is harmful to you or others or you can't stop using drugs when you try
- Crave drugs so much that you spend a lot of time and energy getting drugs, using drugs, and getting over the effects
- Have withdrawal symptoms when you stop using hallucinogens

Dependence is also called addiction. These drugs are very dangerous. Harmful chemicals may be in these drugs. Different batches of drugs are not always the same. There is no way to know how the drug will affect you.

What is the cause?

Hallucinogens change the way your body and brain work. When you use hallucinogens, your brain starts to get used to the. As a result, you think about hallucinogens all the time, you don't feel good unless you use hallucinogens, and

you may act different when you use them. When you stop using hallucinogens suddenly, the balance of chemicals in your brain changes, which causes the symptoms of withdrawal.

You have a higher risk of becoming dependent on drugs if you:

- Have a family history of drug or alcohol abuse
- Have abused alcohol or drugs in the past
- Are easily frustrated, have trouble dealing with stress, or feel like you aren't good enough
- Are regularly around people who use alcohol or drugs
- Have a mental health problem
- Have constant pain

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of hallucinogen abuse or dependence depend on how much and how often you use the drugs. The symptoms can be mild to severe, such as:

- Being overexcited, nervous, or having trouble sleeping
- Having belly pain, nausea, or loss of appetite
- Having a fast heartbeat, heavy sweating, dry mouth, or shaking
- Thinking that others are out to get you when they are not
- Seeing, hearing, or feeling things that are not real
- Having panic attacks
- Having sudden mood changes, such as laughing for no reason, getting angry or irritable, becoming violent or suicidal

If you use hallucinogens, you can have flashbacks, which is feeling the effects of the drug even though you have not taken any of the drugs recently. Flashbacks can happen days, weeks, or even years after you stop taking the drug.

If you are a heavy user, you may have signs of brain damage, such as memory loss, short attention span, and trouble thinking.

A very serious problem with hallucinogens is that they change your sense of reality. For example, you may believe you can fly or drive 1000 miles an hour. Thousands of people end up in emergency rooms with injuries caused by the unreal feelings they have while taking drugs.

An overdose of hallucinogens can be life threatening.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask how much and how often you use hallucinogens. Be honest about your drug use. Your provider needs this information to give you the right treatment. He will also ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. You may have blood or urine tests.

How is it treated?

Hallucinogen abuse and dependence can be treated. For any treatment to be successful, you must want to stop using hallucinogens. Do not try to use alcohol and other drugs to reduce withdrawal symptoms. Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to help you get through withdrawal.

If you are abusing or dependent on hallucinogens and want to quit, get help.

Self-help groups such as Narcotics Anonymous, support groups, and therapy may be helpful. You might be treated in a substance abuse treatment program. Your healthcare providers and counselors will work with you to develop a treatment program.

Recovery from dependence is a long-term process. Follow-up treatment is very important so that you don't go back to abusing drugs.

If you have overdosed, or are having severe withdrawal symptoms you will need to be treated in a hospital. You will also be treated for any health problems such as a heart attack, stroke, or other life-threatening problems.

How can I take care of myself?

The best way to help yourself is to see your healthcare provider and make plans to stop taking drugs. If you are already seeing a healthcare provider, it is important to take the full course of treatment he or she prescribes.

Get support. Talk with family and friends. Consider joining a support group in your area.

Learn to manage stress. Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle. Find ways to relax, for example take up a hobby, listen to music, watch movies, or take walks. Try deep breathing exercises when you feel stressed.

Take care of your physical health. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a healthy diet. Limit caffeine. If you smoke, quit. Don't use alcohol or drugs. Exercise according to your healthcare provider's instructions.

Avoid situations where people are likely to use alcohol or drugs.

Check your medicines. To help prevent problems, tell your healthcare provider and pharmacist about all the medicines, natural remedies, vitamins, and other supplements that you take.

Contact your healthcare provider or therapist if you have any questions or your symptoms seem to be getting worse.

Keep trying. Many people try more than once to quit using drugs before they finally succeed. So, never say, "I can't." You CAN learn to live without hallucinogens in your daily life.

People and resources in your community that can help you include your healthcare providers, therapists, support groups, mental health centers, and alcohol or substance abuse treatment programs. You may want to contact:

- Narcotics Anonymous
818-773-9999
<http://www.na.org>

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