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CHEMICAL · DRUG · PESTICIDE

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"Questions About Hallucinogens"

from

A Federal Source Book:

Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions About Drug Abuse

WHAT ARE HALLUCINOGENS?

Hallucinogens (also called psychedelics) are drugs capable of provoking changes of sensation, thinking, self-awareness and emotion. Alterations of time and space perception, illusions, hallucinations and delusions may be either minimal or overwhelming depending on the dose. The results are very variable; a "high" or a "bad trip" ("freak-out" or "bummer") may occur in the same person on different occasions.

LSD is the most potent and best-studied hallucinogen. Besides LSD, a large number of synthetic and natural hallucinogens are known. Mescaline from the peyote cactus, psilocybin from the Mexican mushroom, morning glory seeds, DMT, STP, MDA and dozens of others are known and abused. Along with its active component THC, marihuana is medically classified as an hallucinogen.

IS IT TRUE THAT ANY DRUG WILL MAKE YOU HALLUCINATE IF TAKEN IN SUFFICIENT AMOUNTS?

Many drugs will cause a delirium, accompanied by hallucinations and delusions, when taken by people who are hypersensitive to them. Extraordinarily large amounts of certain drugs may also produce hallucinations. However, the mind-altering drugs are much more likely to induce hallucinations because of their direct action on the brain-cells.

WHAT IS LSD?

Lysergic acid comes from ergot, the fungus that spoils rye grain. It was first converted in 1938 to lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) by the Swiss chemist, Albert Hoffman, who accidentally discovered its mind-altering properties in 1943.

WHAT ARE THE IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF LSD?

A person who has consumed LSD will have dilated pupils, a flushed face, perhaps a rise in temperature and heartbeat, a slight increase in blood pressure, and a feeling of being chilly. A rare convulsion has been noted. These effects disappear as the action of the drug subsides.

WHAT IS THE LSD STATE LIKE?

The LSD state varies greatly according to the dosage, the personality of the user and the conditions under which the drug is taken. Basically, it causes changes in sensation. Vision is most markedly altered. Changes in depth perception and the meaning of the perceived object are most frequently described. Illusions and

hallucinations can occur. Thinking may become pictorial and reverie states are common. Delusions are expressed. The sense of time and of self are strangely altered. Strong emotions may range from bliss to horror, sometimes within a single experience. Sensations may "crossover," that is, music may be seen or color heard. The individual is suggestible and especially under high doses, loses his ability to discriminate and evaluate his experience.

WHAT IS A "GOOD TRIP"? A "BAD TRIP"?

In the parlance of the LSD user, the "good trip" consists of pleasant imagery and emotional feelings. The "bad trip" or "bummer" is the opposite. Perceived images are terrifying and the emotional state is one of dread and horror.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MORE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF LSD?

During the LSD state, the loss of control can cause panic reactions or feelings of grandeur. Both have led to injury or death when the panic or the paranoia was acted upon.

The prolonged reactions consist of anxiety and depressive states, or psychotic breaks with reality which may last from a few days to years.

WHAT IS A "FLASHBACK"?

A "flashback" is a recurrence of some of the features of the LSD state days or months after the last dose. It can be invoked by physical or psychological stress, or by medications such as antihistamines, or by marihuana.

Those individuals who have used LSD infrequently rarely report flashbacks; **intensive** use seems to produce them more frequently. Often a flashback occurring without apparent cause can induce anxiety and concern that one is going mad. This can result in considerable fear and depression and has been known to culminate in suicide.

CAN LSD DAMAGE CHROMOSOMES?

A number of reputable scientists have reported chromosomal fragmentation in connection with LSD exposure in the test tube, in animals, and in man. A similar number of equally capable scientists have been unable to confirm these findings. The question whether LSD itself can induce congenital abnormalities remains unresolved. Further work is continuing and will clarify this question.

IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT HEAVY LSD USE CAUSES BRAIN CELL CHANGES?

In experiments designed to answer this question, some changes in mental functions have been detected in heavy users, but they are not present in all cases.

Heavy users of LSD sometimes develop impaired memory and attention span, mental confusion, and difficulty with abstract thinking. These signs of organic brain changes may be subtle or pronounced. It is not known whether these alterations persist or whether they are reversible if the use of LSD is discontinued.

ARE PEOPLE MORE CREATIVE UNDER OR AFTER LSD?

People who have taken LSD feel more creative. Whether they actually are or not is difficult to determine. In studies done to compare individuals' creative capabilities before and after LSD experiences, it was found that no significant changes had occurred. Creativity might conceivably be enhanced in a few instances, but it is diminished in others because LSD may reduce the motivation to work and execute creative ideas.

IS THE LSD STATE LIKE THE MYSTICAL STATE?

The transcendental or mystical state includes feelings of wonder or ecstasy, a sense of perceiving beauty, the absence of rational thought, a sense of discovering great meaning. Many of these phenomena can be mimicked by the LSD state, which is why it has been called a "religious" drug. The LSD-induced mystical state differs as significantly from the natural one as an artificial pearl from the real thing.

DO YOU REALLY GET TO KNOW YOURSELF AFTER LSD?

The illusion that one obtains insights about one's personality and behavior while under LSD may occur. From an analysis of these "insights" and of subsequent behavior, it is doubtful that true insights happen with any regularity.

WHY WOULD ANYBODY TRY A DRUG LIKE LSD?

People give many reasons for trying LSD, ranging from curiosity to a desire to "know oneself." The overwhelming majority of people take the drug for the "high" -- to feel better. This may be because they are unable to deal with life's frustrations, or feel alienated. If the LSD state were not accompanied by a "high," it would never have become popular.

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS HAVE TRIED LSD?

Most surveys indicate that about 4 percent of college students have tried LSD at least once. This figure has remained relatively stable for the past three years. However, numbers of high school and junior high school students are known to have tried this drug recently.

IS THE USE OF LSD INCREASING?

The use of LSD has levelled off and may be decreasing. Although some very young people are turning to LSD, a number of the older users are discontinuing its use. This shift is probably due to the growing knowledge of the side effects, the "flashbacks," the possibility of chromosomal changes, or simply because the users finally have come to recognize the illusory nature of the LSD experience.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM LSD?

LSD is the most potent of all hallucinogenic substances used by man. A minute amount reaching the brain produces striking effects on mental functioning.

From research with LSD we have gained much basic information about the nature of brain cell transmission, and how distortion of the chemical mediators of transmission can result in disruptive mental functioning. Experiments that have sought to find a use for this unusual chemical have been inconclusive. It has been tried for the severe alcoholic, in certain character disorders, in childhood autism and as an aid to psychotherapy. At present no medical usefulness has been found.

IS MUCH RESEARCH GOING ON USING LSD?

More than 300 investigators have been given supplies of this drug through the National Institute of Mental Health to carry out research in the past three years. Considerable important work is continuing.

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF ILLICIT LSD?

Almost invariably, illicit LSD comes from clandestine laboratories or is smuggled in from abroad. The precursors, lysergic acid and lysergic acid amide, can be converted into lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) by a proficient chemist who has a reasonably well-equipped laboratory.

When obtained from illicit sources, the quality of LSD varies. Some LSD is fairly pure; other samples contain impurities and adulterants. The amount contained in each capsule or tablet usually differs greatly from the amount claimed by the "pusher." The user has no way of knowing the quality or the quantity of his LSD.