

Legal highs

Substances that mimic the effects of illegal drugs such as ecstasy and speed, but are not controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Act.

What are legal highs?

Recent changes have been made to the availability of many of these drugs, making it illegal to sell them without a legitimate license under the control of the [Medicines Act](#).



Herbal Ecstasy

Herbal ecstasy has until recently been sold freely at dance events, clubs, concerts and festivals. It contains various herbs and extracts that are claimed to be hallucinogenic and/or stimulants.

Packaging and vendors claim that they are a natural and safe substitute for ecstasy. Although they may be herbal or a herbal extract they are not necessarily safe, with side effects similar to synthetic drugs.

[Ephedrine](#) is an extract of the Chinese herb Ma Huang (from the tree *ephedra sinensis*) which has been reported to have stimulant effects such as shivers up and down the spine, sensitive skin and muscles, and feelings of exhilaration. In China the herb Ma Huang is sold as a medicine and as an aphrodisiac. In the UK, it is sold as Cloud 9, Nirvana Plus, and other herbal highs said to mimic ecstasy.

Higher doses can be quite unpleasant, possibly causing muscle spasms and even heart attacks. These drugs should not be used by people with heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, or kidney disease. Side effects include racing heart, dry throat, anxiety, tremor and cold feet and hands.

Yohimbine

Marketed as an aphrodisiac (and often referred to as herbal Viagra) and sold as an [hallucinogenic](#) with [stimulant](#) effects in some natural high capsules such as Yohimbix8 or as an additive to other herbal highs. Yohimbine is derived from the West African Yohimba tree roots or bark, *Corynanthe yohimbe* or *Pausinystalia yohimba*. The drug increases the availability of noradrenaline (a 'fight or flight' hormone that stimulates the body) that in turn raises blood pressure and increases heart rate. The hallucinations are said to be quite strong and the effects on the body similar to that of ecstasy.



Salvia

Salvia is derived from the American plant *Salvia divinorum*, a member of the mint family. It is used by the Mazatecs and others in Meso America in shaman rituals and healing.

It is marketed in the UK as herbal ecstasy using names such as Eclipse. It is purchased dried for smoking (in large amounts) or as a herbal remedy under its botanical name. Its effects are more hallucinatory than other legal highs - though high doses are usually needed to achieve these effects. The main active ingredient is thought to be salvinorum A.

Salvia

Very little is known about these drugs. Proper controlled research is sparse and therefore side effects and possible dangers are not yet known.

Spice

Extract from the above report:

"Smokable herbal mixtures under the brand name Spice are known to have been sold on the Internet and in various specialised shops since at least 2006 and metadata reports (Google Insights web searches) suggest that those products may have been available as early as 2004. Although advertised as an exotic incense blend which releases a rich aroma and not for human consumption, when smoked, Spice products have been reported by some users to have effects similar to those of cannabis."