

## LSD

**Acid, blotter, cheer, dots, drop, flash, hawk, L, lightning flash, liquid acid, Lucy, micro dot, paper mushrooms, rainbows...**

...smilies, stars, sugar, tab, trips, tripper, window and many other names, some which describe the pictures on the squares (such as strawberries).

### What is LSD?

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) is an hallucinogenic drug that is derived originally from [ergot](#), a fungus found growing wild on rye and other grasses. It is a white powder, but as a street drug, it is a liquid either on its own or absorbed into paper sheets.



The sheets are cut into tiny squares like postage stamps or transfers and often have pictures or designs on. LSD is also sometimes dropped on to sugar cubes or formed into tablets or small capsules. Only tiny amounts are needed to get an effect and the strength of LSD can vary greatly. It is usually taken orally.

### Various LSD tabs

## UK news

Although thought of as a sixties' drug, LSD is very much part of the current UK drug scene. It is very difficult to know exactly how many young people have tried LSD or use it on any regular basis because in surveys it is often lumped together with other drugs like amphetamine and ecstasy.

However, in one 1998 survey in England in Wales, 11 per cent of those aged 16-29 said they had tried it at least once, two per cent said they had tried it during the year preceding the survey.

One survey of club goers listed LSD as their fourth favourite' drug to take behind [cannabis](#), [ecstasy](#) and [amphetamines](#) and that is probably a fair reflection of a more general UK league table of illicit drug use, although [nitrites](#) or poppers would be also be high up the list.

The drug has been known to be sold in pill form mixed with ecstasy or amphetamine and sold as ecstasy.

## History

LSD was first discovered in 1938 by a research chemist, Albert Hofmann, while working to produce new medicines. In 1943 he underwent the first ever LSD trip by mistake when carrying out an experiment in his laboratory.

*'Last Friday, April 16, 1943, I was forced to interrupt my work in the laboratory in the middle of the afternoon and proceed home, being affected by a remarkable restlessness, combined with a slight dizziness. At home I lay down and sank into a not unpleasant intoxicated-like condition, characterised by an extremely stimulated condition. In a dreamlike state, with eyes closed, I perceived an uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colours. After some two hours this condition faded away.'*

### Albert Hofmann 'LSD: My problem child', McGraw Hill 1980.

In the 1950s and 1960s doctors in America and the UK used LSD to help some mentally ill patients recall repressed thoughts and feelings. It was also tried out unsuccessfully by the US military as a 'truth drug' for interrogating enemy troops and as a drug simply to cause confusion during a battle.

In the early 1960s people began to experiment with LSD use for pleasure. Among fringe and hippy groups LSD was seen as an almost religious experience and way of getting in touch with the self, other people and environment. The authorities moved

against LSD and in 1966 its use was made illegal in the UK. Because of the bad publicity, medical use also stopped and was prohibited by the [Misuse of Drugs Act](#) when it came into force in 1973.

LSD use declined in the 1970s and early 1980s but its popularity grew again in the late 1980s and early 1990s among young people.

## The law

LSD is a class A drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act. It is not available for medical use and is illegal to possess or supply. Maximum penalties are 7 years imprisonment and a fine for possession and life imprisonment and a fine for supply.

## Effects/risks

LSD is an [hallucinogenic](#) drug. Strength varies but a low dose (half a regular tab) will usually result in a mild LSD experience and full tab in a full blown trip. This begins about 30 minutes after taking LSD and can last up to 20 hours. The effects of LSD vary greatly depending on dose level, how the user feels and the situation they are in. Users often report visual effects such as intensified colours, distorted shapes and sizes and movement in stationary objects. Distortion of sound and changes in the sense of time and place are also common.

*"My very first trip was lovely. The flowers were out and looked amazing. Everything sounded beautiful and crystal clear. I really felt at peace with myself and the world around me".*

Emotional reactions vary greatly. Some people claim they become more aware of themselves and other people and describe LSD trips as being similar to a religious or spiritual experience. Feelings of being separated from the body are also common. Unpleasant or frightening experiences are more likely if the user is already anxious (about what will happen, for example) or depressed. A user may also become panicky and suffer paranoia - particularly in unfamiliar, intense or chaotic environments.

The fact that once LSD is taken there is no going back until it wears off (12 hours or more depending on the dose) means a bad trip can be very disturbing. The same person may have good and bad experiences on different occasions and even within the same trip.

Strengths vary and it can be difficult to know how strong a dose is being taken. If users become anxious they can usually be calmed down and reassured by others, a big hug often helps (euphamistically called baby-sitting).

*"I was with a group of people and we split up and went home. I thought I'd stop tripping by then. I sat down and watched a video. There was a violent scene and I was morbidly fascinated. I sat watching it and suddenly realised I was really upset. I curled up and my hands were twisted into little claws and I started sobbing. It was very frightening and the feeling lasted with me a long time".*

It is difficult to concentrate while tripping and very dangerous to drive or operate machinery. There is no evidence of LSD use leading to physical [dependence](#) or fatal [overdose](#), although people have died through accidents occurring under the influence of the drug. Some LSD users experience '[flashbacks](#)'. This is when a 'trip' is re-experienced some time afterwards. Flashbacks tend to be short lived but can be disturbing, especially if the user does not know that it can happen.

People tend to not use LSD daily, partly because further doses tend to be ineffective without a few days break. However, some people use it so often that they can become out of touch with the real world.

*"It was at a festival. I was anxious anyway, especially as I'd already had one bad experience with acid. It started to rain and I was really scared of being drowned. I got dead paranoid. I suspected everyone around me of being out to get me. Luckily my brother found me and calmed me down but it was horrible".*

There is no evidence of the sixties scare that taking LSD damages chromosomes and so will damage future children of the user.

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