

## Magic mushrooms

**Liberties, magics, mushies, liberty cap, Psilocybe semilanceata, psilocybin, shrooms, Amanita muscaria, fly agaric**

### What are magic mushrooms?

These are hallucinogenic mushrooms that grow wild in many parts of the world and the UK in autumn. The main type used is the liberty cap (*Psilocybe semilanceata*) but fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) is also sometimes used.

Magic mushrooms (except Fly Agaric) are usually eaten raw but are also dried out and stored for later use. They can also be cooked into food or made into a tea or infusion and drunk. 20 - 30 liberty caps would be regarded as a full dose, but only one or part of a Fly Agaric would be required.



**Fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)**

The Drugs Act 2005 pertaining to magic mushrooms came into force July 18 2005. Magic mushrooms are now treated as Class A drugs.

Some recent local UK surveys have found 12 -15 % of 16 year olds claiming to have used magic mushrooms at least once. Young people in Scotland and Wales are more likely to have taken them. In Scotland for example, one in five 16 years olds will have typically tried them.

### History

A huge number of hallucinogenic plants and fungi were used by ancient tribes and civilisations usually as a means of entering the spiritual world. Fly agaric mushrooms were used by medicine men or 'shamans' of north east Asia and Siberia. Liberty caps were seen as sacred intoxicants by the Aztecs of Mexico at the time of the Spanish invasion in the 1500s. They do not seem to feature much in European history, although pagan witches used hallucinogenic plants from the potato family, especially Deadly Nightshade and Henbane.

Use of magic mushrooms for pleasure in the UK appears to have developed in the late 1970s as a legal alternative to LSD. Fly agaric use is still rare but use of liberty caps has become quite common, especially amongst teenagers.

### The law

The law on magic mushrooms has changed. Mushrooms or any fungus containing psilocin or an ester of psilocin have been brought under the [Misuse of Drugs Act](#) and are now class A. This came into force July 18 2005.

Mushrooms are not dealt with in the black market to any great extent at the moment. Indications show that quantities of around 30 mushrooms, if and when they are sold, sell for around 5 per bag. These prices are merely indicative and do not represent a recognised street price.

### Effects/risks

The effects of liberty caps are similar to a mild dose of [LSD](#) and can vary greatly depending on the mood, situation and expectation of the user.



**The liberty cap (*Psilocybe semilanceata*)**

Effects come on after about half an hour and last up to 9 hours, depending on how many are taken. Users often laugh a lot and feel more confident. Some people find that they feel sick, vomit and/or suffer from stomach aches. Higher doses result in a mild to moderate trip with visual and sound distortions.

*"It's a natural high. I giggle a lot and feel more relaxed. It changes the way you see and feel about things. You discover new things about yourself".*

A bad trip can be very frightening and may include fear, anxiety and paranoia. This is more likely with high doses and where the user already feels anxious. People who experience a bad trip can usually be calmed by others reassuring them. Like LSD [flashbacks](#) can be experienced some time later. This is when people re-experience part of a trip and it can be frightening, especially if they do not know it can happen. After a time, these almost invariably fade of their own accord.

*"All of a sudden the walls started to move. I wanted it to end but once you start you can't stop it. It really took a toll on my head".*

The greatest risk is picking the wrong type of mushroom and being poisoned. Eating some varieties especially Amanita Phalloides and Amanita Virosa could be fatal.

Like LSD [tolerance](#) develops very quickly so the next day it might take twice as many liberty caps to repeat the experience. There is thus an inbuilt discouragement to daily use and most users only use occasionally. [Physical dependence](#) and [withdrawal](#) symptoms do not result from regular use though some people may become psychologically dependent and feel a desire to use on a regular basis. At present there is no evidence of serious health damage from long term use.

Fly agaric use is more likely to result in unpleasant effects, including nausea and vomiting, stiffness of joints and lack of co-ordination. Strong doses (anything more than one fly agaric mushroom) may result in intense disorientation, convulsions and in some cases death. Fly agaric has not been brought under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

At present, no serious lasting sequels to the long-term use of hallucinogenic mushrooms have been reported, but there are no studies which might permit the assessment of the effects of extended, frequent use.

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