

MEPHEDRONE

Meow Meow... Plant Food... Israelis... MCAT...

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What is Mephedrone (4-mmc)?

Mephedrone (4-methylmethcathinone) is a synthetic stimulant or 'research chemical'. It was not originally designed as a substance for human consumption, instead primarily used as a research chemical to make things like fertiliser, earning it the nickname of "plant food." Mephedrone is a relatively new drug, first emerging in Europe in 2007. It originates from countries like Israel, China and the UK (AMCD, 2010). The properties of what is in it are changing over time with new ingredients being added to re-constitute or re-brand the drug, possibly to get around legal bans. Access to the drug is often via a dealer or the internet. In 2009/2010, it has grown in popularity in Australia. Because it is fairly new, there is a limited amount of scientific research on this drug or how it affects those who use it.

Mephedrone is described as having both stimulant and hallucinogenic effects, similar to those of ecstasy (MDMA), cocaine, and amphetamines (Winstock, 2010). It is a synthetic version of the cathinone group of drugs. It usually comes in a white powder, capsules, pills or crystals. Sniffing/snorting or swallowing it orally ("bombing") are common ways of taking it. In Australia, the average cost of one gram of mephedrone is reported to be around \$150, and the average cost for one capsule is around \$30 (Matthews & Bruno, 2010).

Can you become addicted to mephedrone?

Whether this is possible is yet to be determined. Researchers are looking into patterns of regular use over time, and whether long term use can develop into dependency, but it is hard to know given that recreational use of the drug has only become popular in the last two years or so. In the UK, over 1,000 school and university students completed a survey questionnaire, and 20.3% reported they had previously used mephedrone. Within this group, 17.6% reported 'addiction or dependence' symptoms associated with their mephedrone use (Dargan, Albert & Wood, 2010).

Reported Effects of the Drug

The effects of mephedrone are reported as lasting 2-5 hours, depending on how the drug is taken.

Immediate effects while using include:

- Feelings of euphoria and excitement
- Feeling of stimulation, energy, hyperactivity
- Fast or racing heart beat
- Increased libido
- Feelings of empathy and warmth to others
- Sweating, overheating, hot flushes, dry mouth
- Headaches
- Grinding teeth and jaw clenching
- Coldness or numbness in fingers or toes
- Blurred vision, dilated pupils

Coming down after-effects include:

- Insomnia and sleeping problems, feeling very tired and down, low mood
- Sore mouth or throat, sore nose and nose bleeds
- Nausea, vomiting, stomach pains
- Feeling anxious, agitated, freaking out, paranoia
- Skin rashes and discolouration of skin
- Memory loss and amnesia

Sources: Matthews & Bruno (2010); Winstock (2010); Dargan, Albert & Wood (2010)

Mephedrone Use in Australia

The findings of the Ecstasy and Related Drug Reporting System (EDRS) described by Matthews & Bruno (2010) provides some of the first available information about use of mephedrone by regular ecstasy users in Australia.

In 2010, the highest rates of mephedrone use by regular ecstasy users were reported in Tasmania (47%) and Victoria (28%). Tasmanian users reported taking the drug more often (on average once a month) compared to other states (on average once every two months).



Reducing risks associated with using mephedrone

You may be at higher risk if you:

- have existing heart/cardiac problems or issues with circulation
- have an existing psychiatric disorder or mental health issues
- are taking medication and mix mephedrone with prescription drugs

Also, the effects of mephedrone when taken during pregnancy or when breastfeeding are currently unknown; the safest way of reducing all potential risks to mother and baby is not to take it at all.

To reduce your risk of harm:

- **Avoid regular use and cut down on re-dose:** mephedrone is described as “moreish”, but there are increased risks in going back for more. Control the quantities you take in one session and avoid regular/long term use.
- **Avoid mixing mephedrone with alcohol and other drugs:** being under the influence of multiple drugs at once (including medications) could cause physical complications (including overdose) and affect your mental health;
- **Don't mix mephedrone with driving, using machinery or going to work;**
- **If you are getting dehydrated or too hot,** drink water regularly (but not too much in one go), sit down and rest;
- **Avoid injecting mephedrone:** there are higher risks of getting a blood-borne virus (hep C, HIV/AIDS) and developing vein problems if you inject. If you're going to take the drug, these risks can be reduced by taking it another way, e.g. swallowing (which still carries risks, but they are a lot lower in comparison to injecting).
- **Avoid unsafe sex:** research evidence suggests that mephedrone affects libido, and people who use it report being more likely to engage in sexual risk taking, especially unprotected sex with casual partners, when using.

Information and Support Options in Tasmania

- In an emergency or cases of suspected overdose, dial 000 for the ambulance and seek medical help immediately.
- Poisons Information Centre: phone 13 11 26 (24 hours a day)
- Alcohol & Drug Information Service: phone 1800 811 994 (24 hours a day)
- Want to detox? Contact the Alcohol & Drug Service Withdrawal Unit, phone (03) 6230 7970.
- Want alcohol & drug rehabilitation services? Talk to the Salvation Army Bridge Program, phone (03) 6278 8140
- Need mental health help now? phone 1800 332 388 (24 hours a day)

References >> for your information

- Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) (2010) *Consideration of the Cathinones* ACMD, Home Office, London.
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- Winstock, A. (2010) 'What should be done about mephedrone?' *British Medical Journal* 340, 1605.