Natural highs [1]

Dear Alice,

Is there a natural way to get high?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Perhaps a challenging concept to define, altering your state of mind, improving your outlook, changing interpretations, reaching a transcendental state, feeling euphoric, or getting blazed, buzzed, baked, or high? tripping, rolling, or railing? one way or another, is a concept that has existed throughout history in cultures all over the world. Today it’s often associated with ingesting a substance to induce such feelings, thoughts, or visions, but pursuing natural highs may easily be much more interesting and sustainable than relying on substances.

Does your question about getting high naturally refer to using substances that occur in nature, or getting high without the use of any substances? Naturally-occurring, mind-altering substances abound. Consuming an organic rather than a manufactured compound doesn’t guarantee that it’s safe; plenty of poisons are also found in nature. But it is true that the feeling of being high ultimately is found in nature? specifically, in your brain. Neurotransmitters are generally responsible for feelings of euphoria or contentment. Most substances work by increasing levels of neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine, in the brain. Endorphins (which mean “natural morphine”) are produced in the brain in response to pain and stress. They increase levels of dopamine, which enhances mood, and they cause reduction in pain levels.

So how may you induce these feelings naturally and safely? Several ways known that don’t involve ingesting, inhaling, or injecting anything include:

- A “runner’s high” is a well-known term, but what is it, exactly? Running and other forms of intense, cardio exercise may alter the brain. Specifically, researchers have found that areas of the brain associated with emotion are flooded with endorphins immediately after strenuous activity. Physical activity may be a great natural high along with its many other pros. Check out the Go Ask Alice! Nutrition & Physical Activity [2] archives for more ideas.
- Meditation [3] may produce a high-like feeling. The process of certain forms of meditation involves quieting the mind by becoming mindful of your thoughts and attempting to release those thoughts or to become aware of the space between the thoughts.
Research indicated that neurochemical changes take place in the brains of seasoned meditators. Try taking some long deep breaths to float on?

- **Orgasms** [4], whether it occurs from sex or masturbation, may produce a feeling of euphoria, an added bonus to other pleasurable sensations that come along with sex. Sounds like a win-win situation.
- Pregnancy has been linked to endorphin release. Preliminary research indicated that the placenta produces endorphins. Perhaps this helps explain the miracle of life.
- **Acupuncture** [5] may also generate a high-like feeling, or feelings of deep relaxation or peace, possibly because pressure applied to specific points may be tied to endorphin release. It may be worth a try.
- The "overview effect" is something most people may not have the opportunity to experience, but it's worth noting. This is a feeling of euphoria and profound connectedness described by many astronauts in space. Researchers have yet to determine exactly what causes these feelings and if it results from the intense experience of being in space and seeing the Earth or if being in zero gravity has an effect on the brain, or some combination. Gives new meaning to feeling "spaced out!"
- **Falling in love** [6] may cause the release of excess serotonin and other neurotransmitters, thus contributing to that (somewhat fleeting) state of bliss. The world could always use some more love.

The above are commonly documented methods to get high naturally. Please note that what works wonders for one may not work the same for you. Other possibilities may involve art, nature, spending time with other people, taking care of yourself, learning, traveling, altruistic endeavors, and spirituality, among many other activities and experiences. Honestly, your imagination's the limit to achieving natural highs. The pursuit of happiness and highs itself may be the greatest high of all!

Alice!

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- Holistic & Integrative Health [9]
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Published date:
Oct 22, 1999

Last reviewed on:
May 14, 2015
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