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S'more info on salvia, please! ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Recently, I have heard about a new hallucinogen available called salvia divinorum. Some of my friends have tried it and they tell me it is an incredible experience and that when you hallucinate, you have the perception of being brought back in time. Before I even think about trying this, however, I would like to have a more precise idea of what the effects are and what the possible risks of taking salvia are.

thanks a lot,
a curious reader

Answer

Dear a curious reader,

Salvia divinorum (a.k.a. *S. divinorum*, Maria Pastora, Sally-D, or simply salvia) is a wild herb in the mint and sage families that can be sipped as tea, chewed or swallowed in its fresh or dried form, or inhaled/vaporized. Its leaves contain an active compound, salvinorin A, which acts on neural pathways and causes a range of reactions, such as seeing bright lights and hallucinations to fear, panic, and loss of consciousness. Salvia has different effects on the body and mind, depending on how it's ingested and the amount consumed. Though it's been around for a long time and pops up in mainstream culture periodically, it isn't clear how the substance affects the body in the long-term. There have been a number of studies that are trying to gain insight into the effects of chronic use as well as how salvia may be useful for medical purposes.

In comparison to other drugs, such as lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), users report the effects of salvia as "intense" and "unique," which are likely due to the differences in chemical make-up. Its hallucinogenic effects include seeing lights, vivid colors, shapes, and body or object distortions. Many users also report a sense of calm, elevated mood, and introspection; however, salvia may also cause fear and panic, uncontrollable laughter, a sense of overlapping realities, and hallucinations. In terms of physical reactions, this drug can also cause loss of coordination, dizziness, and slurred speech. At high doses, there have been reports of severe impairment of motor ability and disruptions in memory recall and recognition. Among those experienced in hallucinogen use, there have been reports of a mix of side effects: pleasant mood, increased

empathy, aesthetic sensitivity, in addition to headache, tiredness, and difficulty concentrating. As for the long-term effects, there's little evidence of salvia causing psychological dependence or lasting psychiatric symptoms beyond the acute effects already mentioned, but there are some reports that link chronic salvia use to memory and cognitive development damage.

The immediate effects of *S. divinorum* can last anywhere from a few minutes up to two hours. The length and intensity of the trip is influenced by the method used to get high — with inhalation causing rapid and shorter highs, peaking after two minutes and quickly fading. Highs experienced through oral ingestion tends to plateau in the first hour and last up to two hours. The intensity of the drug varies based on the leaves, with stronger effects from fresh leaves.

Beyond its recreational use, salvia may also have some potential use in medical treatments. This drug has been used to treat addiction, depression management, and even brain injury caused by lack of oxygen from cardiac arrest or stroke. It's also been suggested that using salvia in research setting doesn't produce lasting negative health effects, but it's good to keep in mind that this is specifically under the supervision of a health care provider. And, while the federal government has not approved the use of salvia for medical purposes, individual states have different types of restrictions on the substance, thus the reason you might find it for sale in some places. In any case, it's critical to be wary of salvia products for sale — they can vary widely in potency and therefore warrant some research beforehand.

Though there's been an increase in available, scientific research, there's still more to know about it. If you want to get more information about salvia and other hallucinogens, the [National Institute of Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](#) [2] is a great resource. You're smart to read up on this substance. If after learning more you're still looking to get that euphoric feeling — but sans mind-altering substances — check out [Fun without drugs?](#) [3] in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives for some fun ideas.

Alice!

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