Ecstasy drains spinal fluid? [1]

Dear Alice,

Does ecstasy drain spinal fluid? Or is this a dumb myth?

Answer

Dear Reader,

As far as your question about whether or not ecstasy drains spinal fluid, rest assured that the popular theory is nothing more than a myth. Ecstasy (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine or MDMA) is a synthetic stimulant drug, with effects similar to amphetamines and mescaline, a hallucinogen. Its use was initially associated with raves and dance parties, but now, it’s used among many different populations. Typically, users report feelings of euphoria, increased energy, and emotional closeness. Through the years, research has been done to help us learn more about what ecstasy is and how it affects the body. For more information about ecstasy, check out What are “rolls”? [2] and other related questions in the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol and Other Drugs [3] archive.

Ecstasy increases the levels of several neurotransmitters, including serotonin, which affect mood, appetite, and sleep. The rumor likely originated from earlier ecstasy use studies, in which researchers used a needle to obtain samples of the subjects’ spinal fluid to assess the levels of serotonin breakdown products. It seems that, somehow, this procedure was distorted into a myth that the drug itself depletes spinal fluid. As one of the myth-busting sites explains, "it is ‘MDMA research’, not ‘MDMA’ that may drain your spinal fluid!" Although there are other factors [4] associated with ecstasy use that may prove to be harmful to your health, the theory that it drains you of your spinal fluid holds absolutely no water.

Alice!

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Published date:
Oct 01, 1993
Last reviewed on:
Jun 25, 2014

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