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Considering taking LSD... [1]

Dear Alice,

I have become interested in trying LSD. But I am worried about what the side effects are and the consequences later in life. I only want to try and have no real need to continue, or desire to, for that matter. I am just really curious. What could happen to me? And do you know where one might find such drugs?

Signed,
Mr. LSD

Answer

Dear Mr. LSD,

LSD (d-lysergic acid diethylamide), or "acid," is a potent psychoactive drug that stimulates the nervous system. Originally derived from "ergot," a fungus that grows on grains such as rye, LSD became popular as a recreational drug in the 1960s, largely due to Harvard psychologist, Timothy Leary, PhD. Leary researched LSD's mind-altering effects and advocated its use for "spiritual growth." His experiments linking LSD to states of enlightenment influenced the counterculture movement, making it a drug of choice among hippies who were on a path to experiencing enlightenment. Tom Wolfe chronicled this in his book, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

Physiologically, LSD produces an increased pulse rate and blood pressure, sweating, palpitations, nausea, and even uterine contractions. If a pregnant woman were to take acid, then miscarriage or premature labor could result.

Psychologically, LSD overloads the brainstem — the sensory switchboard for the mind — causing illusions or pseudo-hallucinations (experiences that can't be classified as real hallucinations), poor judgment, and even sensory crossover — for example, seeing smells or smelling colors.

Reactions to LSD vary, depending on the amount ingested, the surroundings, and the person's expectations, mood, company, and safety. Although pure, laboratory quality LSD has a wide

margin of safety, street LSD may be laced with phencyclidine (PCP), commonly known as "angel dust," "killer weed," and "rocket fuel." PCP is a much more dangerous hallucinogen. As a result, tainted samples make street-sold LSD (as well as other drugs) especially unpredictable.

Even with pure LSD, people can experience "bad trips," with feelings of confusion, terror, anxiety, depression, and/or paranoia lasting up to several hours. In some cases, this extreme agitation has led to accidental death or suicide as people panic and attempt to flee from their hallucinations. Experienced people who take LSD accept these bad trips as possible side effects of their "mind altering" experience. Research suggests that the likelihood of experiencing a bad trip can be reduced by the person being in a controlled and safe environment for the duration of the drug's effects.

Acid's long-term effects include "flashbacks," the re-experiencing of LSD's subjective effects long after it has left the body. While some researchers attribute flashbacks to LSD's toxic effects on brain and/or eye functioning, others see them as re-activations of unconscious thoughts that were first activated when under the influence. The idea that LSD stays in the spinal cord forever is a myth — an urban legend. Rather, LSD is excreted through urine within a day following ingestion. Similarly, the causative link between one time LSD use and chronic psychosis is relatively weak. However, research does suggest that LSD can trigger or precipitate psychotic episodes in people who are already predisposed to psychotic illness.

Keep in mind that LSD is not legal and even going on just one trip could result in a negative experience. If you do decide to experiment, surround yourself with trustworthy people and situate yourself in a safe space.

Alice!

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