What's the difference between molly and ecstasy? [1]

Dear Alice,

What is the difference between molly and ecstasy? On my college campus people keep saying that they take molly. I think they are just taking ecstasy because they act the same. How could they even know what is inside the pill anyway?

— High on life and life alone

Answer

Dear High on life and life alone,

What's in a name? Slang terms for substances can be confusing, so you can rest assured that you're not the only one asking this question. The quick answer is that ecstasy and molly are both slang terms for 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, better known as MDMA. So what's the difference between the two and how can someone know if what they're taking is really MDMA? It's difficult to say because MDMA is an illegal, unregulated substance. Further complicating it, the slang terms are also unregulated (more on this in a bit).

MDMA is a synthetic, psychoactive drug that some people take because it produces feelings of euphoria, warmth, increased energy, and empathy. It can come as a capsule or tablet that users swallow; however, some folks take it in liquid form or snort the crystalline powdered form. And while it may produce some seemingly positive effects, it can also cause the user to experience nausea, involuntary teeth clenching, blurred vision, and muscle cramps. What's more, because it's not regulated, MDMA may contain other substances (anything from sugar and caffeine to methamphetamines and cocaine). These additional substances could lead to a whole host of other side effects.
Molly is generally sold in pure powder form, while ecstasy is usually sold in pill form. Molly is often considered the purer form of MDMA. Why? Many users believe that molly contains more MDMA and less filler compared to ecstasy pills, which users generally expect will have been cut with ingredients other than MDMA. But, as noted earlier, there are no regulations or quality control over the actual content in these illegal substances, so it's unknown how much MDMA is contained in either molly or ecstasy, no matter what you call it.

Kudos for asking more questions about molly and ecstasy! Even though the answer isn’t as clear cut, knowing more about various substances can inform many health and wellbeing decisions. But, if you want to get more information about hallucinogens in general, the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) [2] is a great resource.

Alice!
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