

Narcotic nutmeg ^[1]

Alice,

My friends have told me that the spice nutmeg can be used to get a high, and a pretty intense one. But having to eat about a cup of it to get the high.

Is this true? What effects would this have on your body?

— Potential Spice Girl

Answer

Dear Potential Spice Girl,

It may sound a little nutty, but your friends are partially correct. Nutmeg, a spice commonly used to flavor lattes, sweets, and other foods has also been reported to produce a high that is similar to the one obtained with marijuana. Originating from the *Myristica fragans* tree in Indonesia, the seed is now grown and used globally, mostly for cooking but sometimes as a narcotic. However, for the purposes of getting high, nutmeg is not a commonly used substance. The Illinois Poison Center found that over a ten year period there were only 32 cases of nutmeg poisonings and less than half were intentional (most of which were teenagers). When it's used to get high, nutmeg can lead to some pretty extreme and harmful side effects (more on these later). Want to know more about this spicy substance? Read on!

Nutmeg has a long history of being used for reasons other than seasoning — Europeans used it during the Middle Ages to cause miscarriages, improve their sex drives, ward off diseases like the Black Plague, and, yes, to get high. Nutmeg's psychotropic and hallucinogenic properties are believed to come from oils like myristicin, which belongs to a group of substances used to make ecstasy ^[2]. However, the amount sprinkled in coffee or eggnog isn't enough to create hallucinogenic effects.

How much is too much? It takes over two tablespoons of nutmeg to experience any symptoms other than a yummy flavor in food. If someone does consume that much, toxicologists report that they may feel sluggish, nauseous, and dizzy. Sometimes, those high on nutmeg have trouble forming memories, experience dry mouth, increased heart rate, dilated pupils, delirium, and may

hallucinate. These symptoms usually start three to six hours after ingesting nutmeg and can last for twelve hours. Additionally, other than treating the symptoms, there is no way to stop the high. Nutmeg may also lead to even more serious symptoms as well, such as seizure, urinary retention, and tremor, when combined with prescription drugs or someone has a history of these conditions. And even if someone doesn't experience these extreme side effects, reports indicate those who try it once don't usually try it again due to the effects, with many finding them unpleasant.

It may also be helpful to be aware that myristica oil (which is derived from the nutmeg seed) can also cause poisoning if swallowed in its pure oil form. Poisoning can lead to a variety of symptoms, including:

- Redness or flushing
- Drowsiness or lightheadedness
- Headache
- Brief euphoria (feeling of intoxication)
- Double vision
- Eye irritation
- Agitation or anxiety
- Dehydration or dry mouth
- Chest pain
- Abdominal pain or nausea
- Rapid heartbeat
- Hallucinations or delirium
- Seizures, convulsions, or tremors

List adapted from [MedlinePlus](#) [3].

If you or someone you know does experience a case of nutmeg or myristica oil poisoning, you can call the toll-free [Poison Help Hotline](#) [4] at 1-800-222-1222 and seek immediate medical attention at an emergency room. If you're thinking about using nutmeg or myristica oil to get high, you may want to carefully consider if obtaining a short high from nutmeg is worth the potential risks. While there is a history of nutmeg being used as a narcotic, there is little scientific research in this area, meaning very little is known about the long-term health effects associated with its use. Instead, you may consider other activities that can provide a [natural high](#) [5].

Alice!

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