

Bad trips with LSD, 'shrooms, and hash ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am writing to you regarding drugs. I have always enjoyed dropping hits of LSD, liquid or tabs (never the junky stuff with plenty of strich in it that's here in New York. I always get it sent to me from northern California — Berkeley or Santa Cruz). I've never been a big 'shroomer though. A couple of months ago I did some 'shrooms with my boyfriend at our apartment and had a really bad trip — my first ever — and it was tres scary: I lost completely my sense of reality and felt at once like I was just a part of someone's dream and that when they woke up, I would die into nothingness, then I reverted back into a childlike state, and even though I was a happy child, I still had no grasp on reality. I didn't trip for a couple of months and then a few weeks ago, I was with two of my girlfriends and we made some hash brownies — I had another awful trip, and even though it was more physically sickening, I still had terrible thoughts while I was tripping.... For many months, I have been having a rough time with my boyfriend, whom I live with. Could this be affecting my trips? We also used about half an ounce of hash in three small brownies, and I had more 'shrooms than my boyfriend did. Could the quantity be affecting me adversely?? All of my friends have told me that one of the reasons I must enjoy tripping so much lies in that I am a strong person and don't lose myself when I trip like some people do. I just have fun and usually get horny... Does being a strong person have anything to do with it? I am trying to figure out why I'm having bad trips. What am I overlooking, and will I be able to have happy trails again? What do I need to be doing?? (And, please don't say I should go into rehab....) Thanx.

Dazed and Confused

Answer

Dear Dazed and Confused,

Here's a pill that might be a little tough to swallow: scientists can't pinpoint exactly why your trips have turned sour. However, research does show that a variety of factors can influence your mood while experimenting with hallucinogens. One of the main factors that can affect your experience is who you're with — being in trusted company is associated with more positive trips, while those without close friends nearby are at an increased risk of experiencing negative trips. Any depressive, anxious, and paranoid symptoms a person has prior to tripping may also impact the experience. Additional factors include the reliability of the source of the drugs, whether the

trip is planned in advance, the dose of the drugs, and length of time between trips (it's best if you leave multiple months in between in order to recover from the experience). However, anyone can address all of these factors and still have a bad trip, as there is no one-size-fit model for hallucinogens, such as d-lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and psilocybin magic mushrooms (often referred to as mushrooms or 'shrooms). In the meantime, if you want to keep using these drugs, you may want to focus on your control over some of these factors, such as surrounding yourself with people you trust while you trip and only using when not suffering from anxious or depressive symptoms.

It may be helpful for you to reflect on the circumstances of your last few trips. You noted that you've been having a rough time with your boyfriend lately. Your stress level, your relationship with your boyfriend, your school pressures, your mood going into the trip — all of these cloud the mind and may affect your state while tripping. Have you considered taking a break, taking steps to reduce stress in your daily life, and then see how you feel? What has your mental state been when you were going into a trip? Were you in a location in which you felt physically safe? These questions may help you clarify the relationship you have with hallucinogens.

You also mentioned the dose of the drugs. While you seem to trust the source of your drugs, it's possible that the potency of the drug varies each time you purchase it. Since these drugs are illegal in the United States, their dosages aren't tested or regulated by any regulatory bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The drugs you're consuming may be stronger now than they have been in the past, which is causing you to have a different reaction. Additionally, you mentioned that you generally haven't used mushrooms in the past. It's possible that your response to mushrooms is different than other hallucinogens. Paying attention to how much is consumed and of what drugs may help you pinpoint where your trips are going wrong.

Also, keep in mind that LSD and mushrooms can all have different effects on different people. You've indicated that your trips are generally positive and that you've enjoyed the experience. Keep in mind that previous positive experiences don't mean that future negative experiences won't occur. A bad trip can happen to anyone who is using these drugs, whether it's the first time or the fortieth time. If this is the case, consider taking some time to think about whether using these substances brings you the type of experience you'd like. If you do continue to use them, in what way can you address the factors that have been found to influence your experience? Next time, can you find a comfortable, safe location and be in the company of familiar, trusted folks? Ensuring that you're in a positive headspace or emotional state before tripping may also be key. It's also possible that addressing these factors may not yield expected, positive results or may you've decided that that these substances just aren't resulting in the 'happy trails' you mentioned anymore. In that case, it may be wise to stop for a while and see how that feels. If you find that you're having trouble doing that, you may want to seek some professional assistance from a health care provider or mental health professional. Ultimately, only you can make that choice. You may also find it helpful to read [LSD: Nirvana or burnt out?](#) ^[2] in the [Go Ask Alice! Alcohol & Other Drugs](#) ^[3] archives for more information about the tripping experience.

Hope you're a little less confused,

Alice!

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Footer menu

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[2] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/isd-nirvana-or-burnt-out-0>

[3] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>

[4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>

- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/lsd-pcp-other-hallucinogens>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/marijuana-hash-other-cannabis>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/psilocybin-magic-mushrooms>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/trapped-trip>
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