

Bath salts: Not your average bubbly ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I've been hearing about bath salts a lot lately. What are they?

—Salty

Answer

Dear Salty,

When people hear "bath salts," they probably picture fizzy bubbles floating to the surface of bathwater. However, some people may also be aware that the term is also used as slang for a range of synthetically designed drugs that have no place in your bubble bath. These synthetic cathinones (more on this in a bit) are a man-made, illegal, powdery substance, chemically similar to the illicit stimulants methamphetamine (also known as meth, ice, crystal, chalk, shabu, tik, yaba, pure, base, crank, tweak, and go-fast) and MDMA ^[2]. In fact, they were initially marketed as legal alternatives to drugs such as methamphetamine, cocaine, and ecstasy. Salty, are you still searching for answers? Read on!

This drug falls within the group of new psychoactive substances (NPS), which are a broad category of multiple substances, including synthetic cathinones (a category of drugs which includes bath salts). Because the chemical structures of existing NPS may be easily altered to create new substances, the growing variety of NPS available is very hard to keep track of, let alone legally regulate. So, NPS as a whole were outlawed in 2012, even for medical use.

Now that you know about NPS, it might be helpful to talk a bit more about what synthetic cathinones are. Synthetic cathinones are human-made stimulants that are much stronger than natural cathinones (produced from the khat plant, a shrub grown in East Africa and the southern Arabian Peninsula). The principle mechanism of synthetic cathinones is to flood the brain with more serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine than usual — changing the individual's mood. Synthetic cathinones have been shown to cause agitation and violent behavior, abnormally fast heart rate, paranoia, panic attacks, hyperthermia, hypertension, cardiac arrest, multi-system organ failure, and death (including by suicide). In most of these cases, however, other psychoactive substances were also involved, such as benzodiazepines, cocaine, and selective

serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Bath salts in particular are frequently composed of 3,4-Methylenedioxypropylamphetamine (MDPV), mephedrone, and methylone, but can also be composed of many other substances as well, which can make it harder to differentiate what substances cause what side effects and to determine what is actually being consumed. They may be ingested orally, inhaled, or injected for the purpose of getting high, and the effects can generally be felt within 30 to 45 minutes of being used, lasting between one to three hours.

Since bath salts are unregulated and sold illegally, there's no way to be sure what ingredients a given dose of bath salts contains. Specifically, those who take prescribed amphetamine / dextroamphetamine (brand name: Adderall) and methylphenidate (brand name: Ritalin) may want to be extra careful before using bath salts, as they have the same effects as synthetic cathinones. You can learn more about these types of drugs at the [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) [3]. If you have more questions about illicit drugs, you may want to check out the [Alcohol & Other Drugs](#) [4] section of the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.

Take care,

Alice!

Category:

[Alcohol & Other Drugs](#) [5]

[Cocaine, Speed, & Other Stimulants](#) [6]

[LSD, PCP, & Other Hallucinogens](#) [7]

[Miscellaneous](#) [8]

Related questions

[Foxy methoxy](#) [9]

[We take ecstasy and then pass out on purpose — What's going on here?](#) [10]

[Using stimulant drugs to study](#) [11]

Published date:

Aug 24, 2012

Last reviewed on:

Mar 23, 2018

Footer menu

- ▼ Contact Alice!
 - Content Use
 - Media Inquiries
 - Comments & Corrections
- ▼ Syndication & Licensing
 - Licensing Q&As
 - Get Alice! on Your Website
 - Full Site Syndication
 - Link to Go Ask Alice!

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/bath-salts-not-your-average-bubbly-0>

Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/bath-salts-not-your-average-bubbly-0>
- [2] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/whats-difference-between-molly-and-ecstasy-0>
- [3] <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/synthetic-cathinones-bath-salts>
- [4] <http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/cocaine-speed-other-stimulants>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/lsd-pcp-other-hallucinogens>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/miscellaneous>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/foxy-methoxy-0>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/we-take-ecstasy-and-then-pass-out-purpose-%E2%80%94-whats-going-here-0>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/using-stimulant-drugs-study>