

What are the risks?

Using psychoactive substances / PS has a number of different risks

Psychological:

- Psychosis and further mental health issues
- Feelings of over-confidence
- Reduce inhibitions (which can lead to engaging in risky-behaviours you wouldn't ordinarily do)
- Paranoia and panic
- Increased anxiety and/or panic attacks
- Feelings of confusion
- Strong hallucinations / erratic behaviour
- Impair judgement
- Poor concentration
- Slow down reactions

Physical:

- Addiction
- Unconsciousness
- Coma
- Death (increased risk when using with other depressant drugs like alcohol)
- Seizures
- Increased heart rate
- High or low blood pressure
- Strain on central nervous system
- Strain on immune system (more susceptible to colds/flu etc.)
- Strain on central nervous system
- Increased body temperature
- Dependence

There are still lots of long-term risks that are not yet known. PS have been around less than 10 years so long-term effects have yet to be researched.

Psychoactive Substances / PS and the law

The UK Psychoactive Substances Act came into effect in 2016, and banned all PS.

It is an offence to produce, supply, offer to supply, possess with intent to supply, import or export any psychoactive substances.

Supplying PS to someone else can mean you can get a prison sentence and/or a fine.

Like drinking and driving, it's illegal to drive if your driving has been impaired by taking drugs.

A conviction for a drug-related offence could have a pretty serious impact. It can stop you visiting certain countries – for example the United States – and limit the types of jobs you can apply for.

Find out more

If you would like more information or support on psychoactive substances or you are affected by someone else's use please contact us at Inclusion Recovery Hampshire.

Information is also available at:

NHS Website: www.nhs.uk

Talk to Frank Website: www.talktofrank.com

HOW TO CONTACT US

NORTH: 01782 639856
StarsNorth@mpft.nhs.uk

EAST: 01283 741053
StarsEast@mpft.nhs.uk

WEST: 01785 270080
StarsWest@mpft.nhs.uk

Or visit: www.staffstars.org

You. Me. Us

This leaflet was created by:  **inclusion** Part of Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust Find out more at www.inclusion.org

Psychoactive Substances (also known as PS)

What you need to know!



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What are psychoactive substances?

Sometimes referred to as NPS (New Psychoactive Substances) or 'legal highs'.

- Synthetic drugs
- Chemicals that are designed and made to act in a similar way to and mimic effects of drugs like cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine or methamphetamine.

The myths

- 'Legal highs' are legal - in fact the Psychoactive Substances Act means that it's illegal to produce or supply them.
- They are safer than illegal drugs - this is one of the biggest misconceptions about PS. Just because they are sometimes called 'legal highs' does not mean they are legal or safe, they are actually very dangerous chemicals.
- Can be mixed with alcohol - no they can't, mixing with alcohol is very dangerous. Alcohol is a depressant, it slows down the nervous system which controls the heart and breathing rate. Mixing alcohol with any drug, including PS, can seriously affect your body.
- You know what you are getting - different 'PS labs' produce different drugs, there's no universal strength, ingredients or consistency so it might look the same and be packaged the same as your last batch, but it could be completely different.

Did you know?

One of the difficulties around PS is that we can't say for certain what's in the product. Even when we can, the chemical may not have been used for human consumption before and its short or long term effects are likely to be unknown.

How are they taken?

There are a few ways of taking psychoactive substances:

PS tend to be snorted or swallowed, but there have been reports of some people injecting PS, which is the most dangerous way of using. PS smoking mixtures are either smoked in a 'joint' or by using a pipe/bong.

What does it look like?

PS are normally sold as powders, pills or capsules. The powders can range from white to brown to yellow in colour and from flour-like to little crystals in consistency. While the pills and capsules can range in size, shape and colour.

The smoking mixtures tend to come in colourful packaging, often with labels describing the contents as incense or herbal smoking mixture, and the contents look like dried herbs or plant cuttings. Although they look herbal, they are actually plant material sprayed with potent chemicals they often state on the label "not for human consumption."



What are the effects?

PS include lots of different substances with the ingredients changing frequently it means often the immediate effects can vary. There is the possibility of accidental overdose as the strength of some substances is unknown.

The main effects and risks of almost all 'psychoactive' drugs (PS), can be described using three main categories:

- Stimulants
- 'Downers' or sedatives
- Psychedelics or hallucinogens

Whilst drugs in each of the categories will have similarities in the kinds of effects they produce, they will have widely different strengths

- **Stimulant PS** act like amphetamines ('speed'), cocaine, or ecstasy, in that they can make you feel energised, physically active, fast-thinking, very chatty and euphoric
- **'Downer' or sedative PS** act similar to benzodiazepines (drugs like diazepam or Valium), and like cannabis or GHB/GBL, in that they can make you feel euphoric, relaxed or sleepy and reduce inhibitions and concentration, making you feel forgetful, and slow down your reactions
- **Psychedelic or hallucinogenic PS** act like LSD, magic mushrooms and ketamine. They create altered perceptions and can make you hallucinate (seeing and/or hearing things that aren't there). They can also induce feelings of euphoria, warmth, 'enlightenment' and being detached from the world around you.