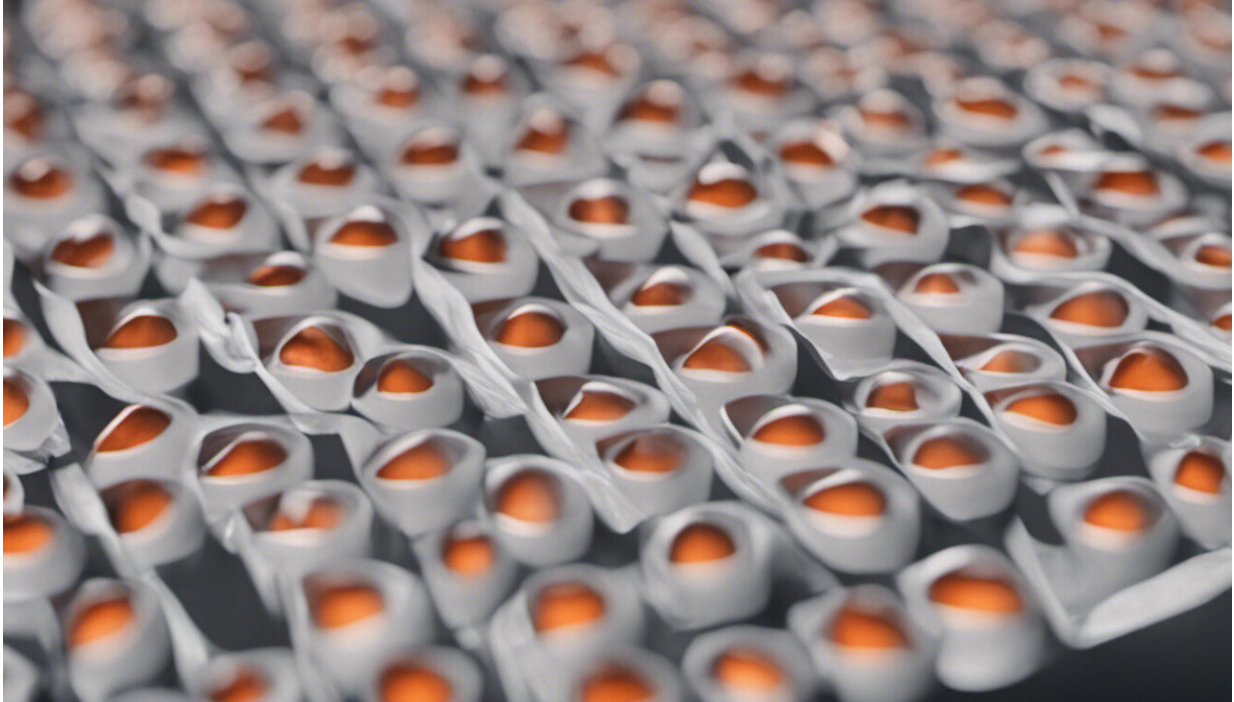


# When to seek help after taking a pill

January 24 2019, by Ian De Jonge

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

With more [suspected drug-related deaths](#) at festivals this summer, the debate around testing these illegal drugs to check their purity and for contaminants has flared up once more. But from a user perspective, when should a person seek help for themselves or a friend after taking a pill? What can ambulance paramedics do to help if you do?

## What are these pills and what do they do?

Generally party drugs contain MDMA (ecstasy). Less commonly they may contain methamphetamine (speed) or cathinone (bath salts).

All of these drugs are taken for the euphoric side effects they produce. A person who has taken these pills may find themselves less inhibited and filled with energy.

It's normal for the user's heart rate and breathing rate to increase slightly. Their pupils will be wider than normal.

## **When to become concerned?**

It's normal for the heart rate to increase a little, if it increases a lot or if the user starts to feel tightness in their chest it's time to get some help.

Likewise it's normal to loosen up a bit, but the user should still be orientated to where they are and what is going on.

If several pills have been taken (or a single particularly strong pill) users can suffer something called "excited delirium". This is where they become confused, very hot and sweaty, and possibly aggressive. If not treated, the condition [can lead to death](#). If you see a friend who has taken a pill acting agitated and confused, it's time to get help.

Pills are usually stimulants: they increase energy and alertness. If too much [alcohol](#) is consumed though, a person can still fall unconscious. When this happens the person can lose their ability to keep their airway open. They can lose the ability to breathe due to vomit in their airway or even their own tongue falling back into their throat. You should roll unconscious people onto their side and seek further assistance.

Sometimes when taking these drugs people can have seizures. This could

be from a combination of the pill, the heat, the alcohol, and any underlying conditions the person has. Roll a seizing person onto their side and get some help.

## What can paramedics do to help?

When you or a friend present to the [ambulance service](#) or medical tent a few things will happen. You will have to give your name and date of birth, this allows for proper continuity of care between the ambulance service and the hospital. You will have your [vital signs](#) taken, paramedics will check your [heart rate](#), breathing rate, [blood pressure](#), the electrical activity of your heart, temperature and blood sugar level.

If a person who has taken a [pill](#) has a racing heart they will be monitored with an ECG (electrocardiogram) machine. If they start to develop [chest pain](#) they may be given specific sedatives designed to relax the body and slow everything down. If they develop the agitation and confusion seen in excited delirium they may be given an injection that will put them to sleep, where they can be safely monitored and cared for.

If a person has fallen unconscious they will need to be closely monitored by paramedics. Often this will involve simply rolling the person onto their side so their tongue flops forward and keeps their airway clear. In very serious situations the paramedics may need to insert a breathing tube down the person's throat to get air to their lungs.

Paramedics carry medications that stop seizures and can monitor the person afterward to make sure they recover normally.

After their initial assessments and interventions, the paramedics will take you to hospital until you have fully recovered.

Whether they are tested or not, whether users know what they are taking

or not, drug use at [music festivals](#) happens and a key factor in good patient outcomes is how early a person presents to a health service. Find out where the ambulance tent is at the next festival you attend and get help when needed.

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