

# PCP (Phencyclidine)



- PCP is usually snorted, smoked, or eaten.
- Psychological effects at high doses include illusions and hallucinations.
- People who use PCP for long periods report memory loss, difficulties with speech and thinking, depression, and weight loss.
- Even moderate use of the drug can negatively affect the hormones associated with normal growth and development.

PCP (Phencyclidine) was developed in the 1950s as an intravenous anesthetic. Use of PCP in humans was discontinued in 1965, because it was found that patients often became agitated, delusional, and irrational while recovering from its anesthetic effects. The variety of street names for PCP reflects its bizarre and volatile effects.

PCP is illegally manufactured in laboratories and is sold on the street by such names as:

- *Angel dust*
- *Ozone*
- *Wack*
- *Embalming fluid*
- *Rocket fuel*
- *Animal tranquilizer*

Names that refer to PCP combined with marijuana or tobacco cigarettes include:

- *Illy*
- *Fry*
- *Wet*
- *Killer joints*
- *Crystal supergrass*

PCP is a white crystalline powder that is readily soluble in water or alcohol. It has a distinctive bitter chemical taste. PCP can be mixed easily with dyes and turns up on the illicit drug market in a variety of tablets, capsules, and colored powders. It is normally used in one of three ways: snorted, smoked, or eaten. For smoking, PCP is often applied to leafy material such as mint, parsley, oregano, or marijuana.

Another way individuals are being exposed is through marijuana joints that are dipped in formaldehyde and ethyl alcohol (ingredients in embalming fluid) and laced with PCP to enhance the effects. It is common for marijuana to be laced with PCP or embalming fluid, both of which produce a hallucinogenic effect including feelings of euphoria and rage. Many users do not know exactly what they are consuming and are not aware that embalming fluid found on the streets contains PCP. Some individuals intentionally smoke marijuana laced with embalming fluid and PCP because since it burns more slowly, there is an increased chance of a prolonged high.

## Health Hazards

PCP is addictive. Its use often leads to psychological dependence, craving, and compulsive PCP-seeking behavior. It was first introduced as a street drug in the 1960s and quickly gained a reputation as a drug that could cause bad reactions and was not worth the risk. Many people, after using the drug once, will not knowingly use it again. Yet others use it consistently and regularly. Some persist in using PCP because of its addictive properties. Others cite feelings of strength, power, invulnerability and a numbing effect on the mind as reasons for their continued PCP use.



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Many PCP users are brought to emergency rooms because of PCP's unpleasant psychological effects or because of overdoses. In a hospital or detention setting, they often become violent or suicidal, and are very dangerous to themselves and to others. They should be kept in a calm setting and should not be left alone.

At low to moderate doses, physiological effects of PCP include a slight increase in breathing rate and a more pronounced rise in blood pressure and pulse rate. Respiration becomes shallow, and flushing and profuse sweating occur. Generalized numbness of the extremities and muscular incoordination also may occur. Psychological effects include distinct changes in body awareness, similar to those associated with alcohol intoxication. Use of PCP among adolescents may interfere with hormones related to normal growth and development as well as with the learning process.

At high doses of PCP, there is a drop in blood pressure, pulse rate, and respiration. This may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, blurred vision, flicking up and down of the eyes, drooling, loss of balance, and dizziness. High doses of PCP can also cause seizures, coma, and death (though death more often results from accidental injury or suicide during PCP intoxication). Psychological effects at high doses include illusions and hallucinations. PCP can cause effects that mimic the full range of symptoms of schizophrenia, such as delusions, paranoia, disordered thinking, a sensation of distance from one's environment, and catatonia. Speech is often sparse and garbled.

### Long-term Effects

These symptoms can persist up to a year after cessation of PCP use. Mood disorders also have been reported. PCP has sedative effects, and interactions with other central nervous system depressants, such as alcohol and benzodiazepines, can lead to coma or accidental overdose.

PCP poses particular risks for young people. Even moderate use of the drug can negatively affect the hormones associated with normal growth and development. PCP use also can impede the learning process in teenagers.

### People Who Use PCP for Long Periods of Time Report:

- Memory loss
- Difficulties with speech and thinking
- Depression
- Weight loss

## Connecticut Resources

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

[www.ct.gov/dmhas](http://www.ct.gov/dmhas)

24/7 access line:

**1-800-563-4086**

## National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

National Institute on Drug Abuse

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

