

# Synthetic Psychoactive Substances



Synnies, Synthetics, herbal highs, bath salts, Ice, sometimes referred to by brand names.

## What is it?

Synthetic Psychoactive Substances fall largely into two categories- Synthetic Cannabinoids and Synthetic Cathinones, although there are other types of synthetic substances that are developing all the time. All Synthetic Psychoactive substances are man-made chemicals that mimic the effect of another type of substance. Synthetic Cannabinoids mimic the effects of THC, the chemical in cannabis that gets you 'high'. These synthetic chemicals are then sprayed onto plant matter and smoked. There are different chemicals used and given these are now illegal in NZ, most of what is sold illegally are untested and risks are unknown.



Synthetic Cathinones are also man-made chemicals that have a stimulant effect. They are sometimes referred to as Bath Salts or Ice and can be sold as pills, capsules or crystal powder. As such they can sometimes be passed off as MDMA (ecstasy) or methamphetamine. Synthetic Cathinones are far more harmful and toxic than the substances they mimic.

## What do they do?

Whether using synthetic cannabinoids or synthetic stimulants, users report similar feelings to the substances the synthetic drugs are designed to mimic (e.g. cannabis or amphetamines). However, these feelings tend to be more intense and tend to be more commonly associated with unpleasant buzzes or experiences, risky physical and mental health reactions (e.g. vomiting and psychosis) and have even been associated with the deaths of some users in NZ and overseas.



## Synthetic Psychoactive Substances and your mental health:

There is increasing concern about serious acute and long-term toxicities and long lasting mental health problems for users of synthetic drugs. People with pre-existing mental health problems can be particularly vulnerable. Problems can include anxiety and Psychosis.



## What happens if I stop using?

The first few days may be very intense and some users have reported strong symptoms and cravings for a few weeks. In rare cases there has been report of some symptoms lasting for much longer but these should still resolve by themselves. Most people can get through mild withdrawal by knowing what to expect and taking care of themselves by way of rest, mild exercise and keeping hydrated. Some users report more risky or distressing withdrawal symptoms which can require professional support to manage. Seek help with your GP or local Alcohol and Drug service if unsure or concerned about what might happen when you stop.



**There is no "safe way" to use synthetic psychoactive substances and their use has been linked to the deaths of users in New Zealand.**

# Synthetic Psychoactive Substances



## Synthetic Psychoactive Substance Withdrawals – Here are some of the things you may experience

### Physical Health

- Chest pains
- Heart palpitations
- Tremors
- Seizures
- Sweating
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia
- Difficulty breathing

- Constipation
- Vomiting and diarrhoea
- Weight loss
- Dehydration
- Pins and needles

### Mental health

- Low mood
- Suicidal feelings
- Paranoia
- Psychosis
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling emotional
- Sleeping problems
- Confusion
- Fear of dying
- Craving
- Irritability and aggression

## Things to know

- It is safest not to use synthetic drugs.
- The strength of chemicals and types of chemicals used in synthetics can change. This makes it hard to know what kind of experience you might have and there can be the risk of unpleasant experiences, medical problems and even overdose. In other words, what you bought yesterday might not be what you are getting today.
- Don't mix with other drugs or alcohol.
- Don't drive or do anything that requires coordination after using.
- **Call an ambulance (111) if things get bad.**

See [www.drugfoundation.org.nz](http://www.drugfoundation.org.nz) for more details re- Staying Safe.

## Getting help

If there is an emergency call 111 immediately. These helplines can provide support to those looking for help:

- Alcohol and Drug Helpline (10am - 10pm) 0800 787 797
- Healthline 0800 611 116
- Lifeline (24/7) 0800 543 354

You can also visit your GP for help, or if you're experiencing withdrawal and can no longer cope with the symptoms go to the Emergency Room of your nearest hospital.



## **sorted**

is a team of health care professionals working to support young people aged up to 18 who have concerns about their own, or someone else's alcohol and other drug use.

Call them direct on 07 557 5052 or 0800 BAYSORT, 0800 229 7678 or email [sorted@bopdhh.govt.nz](mailto:sorted@bopdhh.govt.nz)