

Nourish

A Biweekly Newsletter
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Psychedelic Therapy

What Is It?

The use of plants and compounds that can induce hallucinations to treat mental health diagnoses. The compounds that doctors frequently use in treatment include Psilocybin Mushrooms, LSD, and Mescaline.

The Goal

To increase the success of traditional treatments. Doctors try this form of therapy on people whose symptoms have not responded well to standard medications or therapies.

How Does It Work?

Researchers predict that psychedelics may “reset” the brain by altering neurotransmitter levels, by inducing a new perspective on life, by causing a person to have a mystical experience, or by teaching a person a new way of thinking. Some research also suggests that psychedelics increase suggestibility, making a person more open to ideas discussed in therapy. Psychedelic Therapy remains an experimental treatment, which means that people can usually only access this treatment via clinical trials.

Types of Psychedelic Therapy

Drug Assisted Therapy: When a provider offers traditional treatments (psychotherapy) alongside psychedelics.

Guided Therapy: A person will guide an individual through the psychedelic “high,” offering therapeutic suggestions and helping the person remain calm, if needed.



Uses and Benefits

Terminal Illnesses

Studies suggest that psychedelic therapy may ease the existential dread, anxiety and depression that come with dying or what might happen after death. A 2016 study of 29 people with cancer who had anxiety or depression related to their diagnosis compared those who got a single dose of psilocybin mushrooms to those who got a placebo. The psilocybin reduced cancer-related anxiety, hopelessness, and dread immediately after the dose. At 6.5 months, 60-80% of the psilocybin group continued to report improvements in depression and anxiety.

Depression and Anxiety

A 2021 study asked 164 people who reported experiencing a psychedelic experience to discuss their mental health symptoms. Significant reductions in depression, anxiety, and stress following the experience were reported. An analysis revealed that participants also had greater compassion and less frequent rumination.

PTSD

A 2020 review looked at four studies of MDMA and 5 studies of ketamine for the treatment of trauma. The evidence supporting ketamine alone was very low, as well as the evidence for ketamine with psychotherapy. Researchers found moderate evidence supporting the effectiveness of MDMA.

Addiction

Addiction and other mental health symptoms, such as depression, commonly occur together, which may help explain the benefits. Psychedelic assisted psychotherapy also shows promise for reducing nicotine addiction. A 2014 Johns Hopkins study combining the use of psilocybin sessions and CBT showed that 80% of participants had quit smoking at their 6-month follow-up.

Eating Disorders

The mystical and psychedelic experiences a person has with psychedelic therapy may shift their body image away from unhealthy thoughts, potentially easing symptoms of eating disorders. In a 2020 study, it was reported that being under the influence of psychedelics offered new insights to embrace healthier habits.

Possible Risks

Psychedelic drugs induce powerful changes in consciousness that can cause serious effects. These may include psychosis, fear, or cardiovascular issues. It is important to note that despite these risks, most studies report few or no negative reactions. In research settings, clinicians screen participants for any family history of psychotic disorders to avoid risk.

Further Reading

- How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence by Michael Pollan [read here](#)
- Rapid and sustained symptom reduction following psilocybin treatment for anxiety and depression in patients with life-threatening cancer: a randomized controlled trial [read here](#)
- Changes in self-rumination and self-compassion mediate the effect of psychedelic experiences on decreases in depression, anxiety, and stress [read here](#)
- Efficacy of Psychoactive Drugs for the Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review of MDMA, Ketamine, LSD and Psilocybin [read here](#)
- Psychedelic Treatments for Psychiatric Disorders: A Systematic Review and Thematic Synthesis of Patient Experiences in Qualitative Studies [read here](#)
- Psilocybin-assisted treatment for alcohol dependence: a proof-of- concept study [read here](#)
- Psilocybin with psychological support for treatment-resistant depression: an open-label feasibility study [read here](#)
- Psilocybin, psychological distress, and suicidality [read here](#)
- Long-term follow-up of psilocybin-facilitated smoking cessation [read here](#)
- Reviewing the Potential of Psychedelics for the Treatment of PTSD [read here](#)