

How do you look after someone who is having a ‘bad trip’?

Helping someone who is drug-affected can be difficult and potentially dangerous. Often, the person may be aggressive and un-cooperative. While it is important to try to keep your friend safe, the first priority must always be your personal safety. Never be afraid to pass the problem over to someone else, particularly if they become violent. If in doubt, always call 000.

ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU ARE A FRIEND, NOT A DOCTOR.

If someone you know is having a bad trip, here are a few things you can do to lessen the impact and make them feel more comfortable:

- **Stay with them and never leave them alone**
- **Change the environment**

- **Monitor them**
- **Reassure them and ‘talk them down’**
- **Let them know the time**
- **Help them to relax by breathing with them**
- **If in doubt, call for help**

Be aware that the police do not routinely attend an ambulance call, even if there are illegal drugs involved. The only reason the police will usually attend is if the paramedics ask them to be there. This is usually due to another crime taking place or the threat of violence.

Many hallucinogens, including LSD, are illegal and if you are found with them in your possession you could face fines and/or a prison sentence, as well as a possible criminal record.

What is a ‘bad trip’?

A ‘bad trip’ is a term used to describe an unpleasant and frightening experience a person has when they have used a hallucinogenic drug, like LSD or ‘magic mushrooms’. Usually it begins as an overwhelming feeling of anxiety but in some extreme cases the user starts to begin to see things that they are scared of like spiders and snakes. Bad trips usually happen for a reason. They can be caused by using more of the drug than you are used to; trying to resist the effects of the drugs because you are scared or can’t relax; being in an unpleasant environment where you don’t feel comfortable; and having problems weighing on your mind before you used the drug. Even people who have used drugs for a long time sometimes have a bad trip.

The best way to avoid a bad trip is to avoid taking a drug at all. Often a bad trip starts small and snowballs into rising feelings of anxiety, fear and paranoia. People who are having such an experience may appear withdrawn and quiet, or visibly upset or frightened. In extreme cases they may become wild and out of control.

What are the major dangers associated with a ‘bad trip’?

A bad trip is not usually life-threatening, unfortunately however, there have been cases of LSD and other illicit drugs containing particularly dangerous substances (most usually the NBOME group of drugs) that have resulted in hospitalisations and even deaths. Signs that something could be very wrong include very high body temperature, losing touch with reality and psychotic behaviour. If in doubt, call 000 immediately.

The experience can be extremely frightening, even for those who have used hallucinogenic drugs many times, and can result in them becoming extremely anxious. This may lead to a panic attack leading to a belief that they will die or lose total control. If this happens they may find it difficult to breathe, resulting in even more anxiety and even more problems breathing and swallowing. They may complain of a headache, backache, chest pains or palpitations. Although panic attacks can be alarming, they’re relatively harmless and usually pass without causing long-term problems. Even so, trying to look after someone in this state can be very difficult.

Medical Disclaimer

The information provided on this fact sheet is provided for information purposes only. As such it **cannot substitute for the advice of a medical professional**

How do you look after someone who is having a 'bad trip'?

The greatest danger however, is the risk of an accident or injury. When affected by hallucinogens, the person has altered perceptions and may not be fully aware of the risks around them. If they are frightened or scared they may want to try to get away from their environment in an attempt to stop the tripping experience. Falling over, running onto a road or cutting or injuring themselves in some way are all real risks if they are not watched carefully.

Things to do if your friend is having a 'bad trip'

- **Stay with them and never leave them alone** – it is important for them to know that they are not by themselves, at the same time, make sure that they have lots of space so they do not feel cramped in
- **Change the environment** – this can involve moving the person, altering the music that is playing or changing the lighting in the room. Never force anyone to do anything – remember, they may already be paranoid and frightened, don't scare them anymore. Gently encourage them to move to a safer space if you are able to do so
- **Monitor them** – one of the greatest dangers at this time is the person affected may not be able to think straight and may put themselves into situations that are unsafe. It is vital they are watched carefully, but at the same time remembering that they could be paranoid and your actions could be misinterpreted
- **Reassure them and 'talk them down'** – make sure that you tell them that the reason they are feeling the way they do is because of what they have taken and the experience will end in time. They need to be told that they will be okay and they just need to 'ride it out' (this is often called 'talking them down') – speak in a soft and measured voice and give them a simple sentence to repeat with you, e.g., "This is not real and it will pass". If they are experiencing a panic attack and they are finding it difficult to breathe (it is rapid and irregular), get them to breathe more slowly by copying your breathing (in through the nose, out through the mouth)

- **Let them know the time** – unfortunately one of the side effects of using hallucinogens is the distortion of time and they can feel that their bad trip is lasting forever. Letting them know how much time has really passed can be extremely helpful and reassuring
- **Help them to relax by breathing with them** – the fear that many people feel during a bad trip is often made worse by tensing up and trying to resist. If you can get them to 'let go' and relax it will make them feel better. Concentrating on a good breathing technique will relax them and give them something to focus on
- **If in doubt, call for help** – most people who are having a bad trip will not need medical help, but if at any point you believe the person's life is in danger, call 000 immediately. Paramedics know exactly how to deal with a person who is tripping and handing over the situation to them is absolutely the best thing to do

Be aware that the police do not routinely attend an ambulance call, even if there are illegal drugs involved. The only reason the police will usually attend is if the paramedics ask them to be there. This would usually happen if they reported another crime taking place or they believed there was a threat of violence.

Things to do once your friend is feeling better

- **Make sure they get home safely and check on them the day after** – this can be a traumatic and embarrassing experience, particularly if it happened at a party or gathering, and it can take some time for the person to recover. Getting them home or handing them over to someone you trust is important but giving them a reassuring call the next day can make all the difference