

N,N-DIMETHYLTRYPTAMINE (DMT)

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Introduction:

N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) is the prototypical indolethylamine hallucinogen. The history of human experience with DMT probably goes back several hundred years since DMT usage is associated with a number of religious practices and rituals. As a naturally occurring substance in many species of plants, DMT is present in a number of South American snuffs and brewed concoctions, like Ayahuasca. In addition, DMT can be produced synthetically. The original synthesis was conducted by a British chemist, Richard Manske, in 1931.

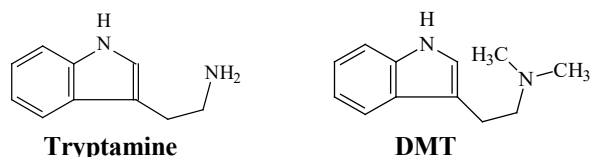
DMT gained popularity as a drug of abuse in the 1960s and was placed under federal control in schedule I when the Controlled Substances Act was passed in 1971. Today, it is still encountered on the illicit market along with a number of other tryptamine hallucinogens.

Licit Uses:

DMT has no approved medical use in the United States but can be used by researchers under a schedule I research registration that requires approval from both DEA and the Food and Drug Administration.

Chemistry:

Like other indolethylamine hallucinogens, DMT consists of the tryptamine core structure (left, structure below). DMT is formed by substituting two methyl (CH₃) groups for the two hydrogen atoms (H) on the terminal nitrogen of the ethylamine side chain of tryptamine.



Pharmacology:

Administered alone, DMT is usually snorted, smoked or injected because the oral bioavailability of DMT is very poor unless it is combined with a substance that inhibits its metabolism. For example, in ayahuasca, the presence of harmala alkaloids (harmine, harmaline, tetrahydroharmaline) inhibits the enzyme, monoamine oxidase which normally metabolizes DMT. As a consequence, DMT remains intact long enough after oral administration to be absorbed in sufficient amounts to affect brain function and produce psychoactive effects.

In clinical studies, DMT administered intravenously was fully hallucinogenic at doses between 0.2 and 0.4 mg/kg. The onset of DMT effects is very rapid but usually resolves within 30 to 45 minutes. Psychological effects include intense visual hallucinations, depersonalization, auditory distortions and an altered sense of time and body

image. Physiological effects include hypertension, increased heart rate, agitation, seizures, dilated pupils, nystagmus (involuntary rapid rhythmic movement of the eye), dizziness and ataxia (muscular incoordination). According to American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) data, coma and respiratory arrest have been associated with DMT exposures.

Illicit Uses:

DMT is used for its psychoactive effects. The intense effects and short duration of action are attractive to individuals who want the psychedelic experience but do not choose to experience the mind altering perceptions over an extended period of time as occurs with other hallucinogens, like LSD.

DMT is generally smoked or consumed orally in brews like Ayahuasca.

Illicit Distribution:

DMT is found in a number of plant materials and can be extracted or synthetically produced in clandestine labs. Like other hallucinogens, Internet sales and distribution have served as the source of drug supply in this country. According to the National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS), the reporting from federal, state, and local forensic laboratories has remained fairly stable with 604 DMT reports in 2015, 587 reports in 2016, and 663 reports in 2017. From January to December 2018, there were an estimated 712 DMT reports. According to NFLIS, illicit use of DMT has been encountered in all states.

Control Status:

DMT is controlled in schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act.