



Education

Phencyclidine Hydrochloride (PCP)

What is phencyclidine hydrochloride (PCP)?

PCP is an illegal, common street drug. It has other names, including angel dust. PCP can be smoked, snorted, injected, or taken by mouth. A fatal dose is about 1 mg/kg in adults and less in children.

PCP is a hallucinogen. Hallucinogens are drugs that can cause you to see, hear, and feel things that are not real. PCP can make you depressed, numb, and it can change your sense of reality and time. PCP abuse often leads to physical injury to the user or those who come in contact with him or her.

PCP powerfully affects some of the chemicals of the body and brain that change mood and emotions. Extreme reactions can make users become very strange. They can be violent against themselves or others. Occasionally, heart or lung failure can occur.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of PCP abuse include:

- hallucinations (seeing, hearing or feeling things that are not there)
- a "ready for a fight" attitude
- agitation and irritability
- disorientation
- paranoia, or feelings of suspicion and mistrust
- an extreme belief in one's importance
- euphoria, or high feelings of mental well-being, especially when not real
- thoughts of suicide
- an abnormal awareness of sounds
- nausea or vomiting
- loss of memory
- inability to speak.

How is PCP abuse diagnosed?

In an emergency, an overdose of PCP can be confused with schizophrenia. Users may withdraw from other people and the outside world and become totally self-absorbed.

The health care provider will order blood and urine tests. These tests can quickly tell if PCP has been used.

How is PCP abuse treated?

The first and most important step is to prevent lung failure and convulsions. You will be hospitalized so that the airway to your lungs can be kept clear. PCP can be removed from your stomach by a procedure that washes out the stomach and brings up its contents.

If convulsions begin, medicine will be injected into your veins. You will be watched closely. Restraints may be used to help prevent injuries. Sedating drugs may be given if you have hallucinations and delusions. You may be given other medicine to reduce high blood pressure and control a fast heart rate.

You will be given medicines and liquids to help you to urinate and get rid of PCP in your system. If your overdose is severe, another drug may be given to speed up urination.

Substance abuse is a life-long disease that only can be controlled, not cured. For any treatment to be successful, you must want to give up PCP.

How long will the effects last?

The effects will last as long as there is PCP in your system and as long as you continue to use the drug. People who use PCP for long periods can have memory loss, trouble thinking and talking, and weight loss. These symptoms can last up to a year after stopping PCP use. Mood disorders such as depression and panic also have been reported.

How can I take care of myself?

Take the full course of treatment your health care provider prescribes. Stop taking this drug and ALL other drugs unless your health care provider prescribes a legal drug.

How can I prevent PCP abuse from occurring?

Changing your lifestyle can help you to stop using PCP. Make the following a regular part of your life:

- Find new friends who don't abuse drugs or alcohol.
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes 3 times a week.
- Participate in relaxing recreation activities at least once or twice a week.
- Do progressive relaxation exercises daily.
- Imagine, or call to mind, your positive life experiences often.
- Eat balanced, nutritious meals.
- Get 6 to 8 hours of rest per night.
- Practice deep breathing exercises during times of high stress.
- Talk with friends and develop other support systems.
- Drink little or no alcohol or caffeine.
- Listen to music to help you relax.
- Get help at home and work when the load is too great to handle.
- Seek professional help to talk through anxiety-producing life events. Ask for help in developing positive coping methods.

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