Ayahuasca
Harm Reduction Information

Also called yajé, hoasca and caapi; the vine is Banisteriopsis caapi

Last updated 10/28/2026

Please Read First

This page is educational. It is not medical, legal or professional advice, and I am not a physician or an attorney. This information was gathered from published harm reduction organizations, medical and legal sources, and my own training and experience, and I may have made mistakes. You are responsible for confirming anything here before you act on it, with a qualified medical provider and, for questions of law, an attorney. Laws and knowledge about psychedelics change quickly, and some of what is written here may have changed since the date above. Nothing here encourages anyone to break the law. It exists to reduce harm for people who will make their own choices. I do my best to keep up with current law and research, but I cannot promise that anything here is current or complete.

It is advisable to meet with a psychedelic-informed physician for an assessment before using any psychedelic or related substance.

Where this information came from: The sources listed under References, and my own training and experience.

This document was drafted with the support of Claude, an AI assistant. I reviewed it, and AI and I can both be wrong, so check anything that matters to you before you act on it.

What Ayahuasca Is

Ayahuasca is the vine-and-leaf brew of the Amazon, and it is also a monoamine oxidase inhibitor, which is why the medicine cabinet matters as much as the ceremony. It is made by boiling or soaking the stems of the vine Banisteriopsis caapi with the leaves of another plant, most often Psychotria viridis (chacruna) or Diplopterys cabrerana (chaliponga) [1][2]. The name comes from Quechuan words for spirit and rope [1]. You will also hear yage, yaje, hoasca, daime, caapi and pinde [1][2].

The vine holds harmala alkaloids (harmine, harmaline and tetrahydroharmine), which block an enzyme called MAO-A [1][3]. The leaves hold DMT. Swallowed by itself, DMT is broken down in the gut and liver before it can act, and the vine is what lets it through [4][3]. DMT acts mainly on serotonin 5-HT2A receptors [5]. The harmala content of the vine varies a great deal, so brews differ from batch to batch [6].

Outside the Amazon you will meet analogue brews, which swap in other plants such as Syrian rue seeds for the vine and mimosa root bark for the leaves, and pharmahuasca,

made from purified chemicals [7]. Some traditional brews also have tobacco, Brugmansia or Datura added [7].

Where It Comes From

Written Western accounts begin in the 17th century with Jesuit missions, and the botanist Richard Spruce documented the vine in 1852 [1].

Three Brazilian religions grew up around the brew: Santo Daime, founded by Mestre Irineu in the 1920s and 1930s, with a church at Alto Santo in 1945; Barquinha, founded by Mestre Daniel in 1945; and the Uniao do Vegetal (UDV), founded by Mestre Gabriel in 1961 [8]. Brazil listed the vine as prohibited in 1985, lifted that and authorized ritual use in 1987, and its national drug council recognized free religious use on 11/4/2004 [8]. Erowid dates Brazil's legalization to 1992, so sources disagree on how to date it [9].

Santo Daime and the UDV began holding ceremonies in the United States in 1988 [8][10]. Interest grew sharply after 2000 [11]. The Global Ayahuasca Survey drew 10,836 respondents from many countries, with Brazil and Latin America over-represented [12]. An ICEERS estimate puts the number of people who have ever taken ayahuasca above four million, and about 820,000 in 2019; ICEERS is a group that argues for ayahuasca's safety, so treat the figure as an estimate [13].

About the Sources

Most of what is known comes from small studies of healthy adults, a few trials in depression, surveys of people who chose to take it, case reports, and media accounts of deaths. Surveys of people who chose to take ayahuasca are not a random sample. No randomized trial has tested any drug interaction. Some studies I could read only as abstracts, so those figures come from the abstracts. Where a source is a community wiki, a vendor, a blog or a single pharmacist's slide set, the sheet says so.

What It Feels Like

No one can promise you what your night will be. People describe ayahuasca in very different ways, and the same person can have a funny night and a weepy one, or both inside the same hour. This section gives the range people report, so the first time holds fewer surprises. Most of what is known comes from people who chose to drink and then chose to answer a survey or an interview, so the accounts lean toward people who found it meaningful, and the researchers say so themselves [14][15][16]. Erowid and PsychonautWiki are collections of user reports and not studies, and I mark them that way. I read most of the studies below only as abstracts or summaries, and the reference list says which.

The Body and the Purge

For most people the body speaks first. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are the most commonly reported effects, along with alternating sweats and chills, body aches, and

trouble balancing or walking [17][18]. Vomiting is the most frequent of these, and the survey numbers are under Vomiting, Fluids and Salt Balance, later in this sheet. Erowid compares it to flu or food poisoning, says it is reported less often with repeated use, and says sedation is common [18].

In the traditions of the Upper Amazon, the purge is often the point and not a side effect. ICEERS notes that many Indigenous practitioners see it as desirable [19]. Practitioners at a treatment center in Peru describe purging as going beyond vomiting, as a release of what a person carries, and as closely tied to healing [20]. An anthropologist quoted in Vice describes purging as taking many forms (vomiting, diarrhea, shaking, crying, sweating) and says vomiting can come from anger, sadness or fear holding on [21]. One author writing about a community in the Upper Amazon says healers use the brew mainly to find the cause of an illness, and that visions are sought for diagnosis and not for their own sake [22]. I describe what researchers and practitioners say about Upper Amazon practice and do not speak for any one people.

Some researchers link the force of the vomiting to serotonin acting on the brainstem and the gut; that is expert opinion in a news article and not settled pharmacology [21]. PsychonautWiki says nausea goes with more anxiety and confusion, and that different preparations can reduce the purge; I could not check that against a study [17].

Past the purge, some people describe a warm, soft glow through the body, and the energy depends on the room: movement and fast music can stimulate, while a calm dark room can sedate [17]. In a small study of first-time drinkers in Brazilian churches, about a third described an altered sense of the body, such as feeling merged with their surroundings or separate from the body [23].

How the Night Tends to Move

An analysis of written accounts from 25 northern Europeans described a pattern: a frightening, constricting phase with physical distress, then an abrupt shift into expansive states of unity and peace with a changed sense of time and space, then reflection [24]. In the traditional belief an anthropologist describes, once the purging is done the person moves into an ecstatic state [21]. That is a pattern from a small sample and not a script, and many nights do not follow it. Ceremonies in religious settings often run through the night [1]. Both Erowid and PsychonautWiki say effects can linger for some hours after the main experience [17][18].

Seeing and Hearing

Visions are the most commonly reported part. In first-time drinkers in Brazilian churches, a clear majority described colored lights, geometric patterns, tunnels, animals, people and supernatural beings [23], and eight of nine people in a Peru interview study described visions [25]. PsychonautWiki describes brighter colors, flowing patterns and repeating symmetrical textures, says the visions are strongest in the dark, and says themes tend toward the personal, spiritual or surreal; many people describe their thinking as clear and

sober while the visuals run [17]. Erowid reports snakes, big cats, insect-like beings or goddess figures, and for some people only visual static; sounds can be distorted [18]. Some people see very little.

Strong visuals alone are not a sign that something is wrong. In a reanalysis of the Global Ayahuasca Survey, stronger visual distortions were not linked to worse mental health, and when people found the ceremony spiritually meaningful they were linked to better scores; the data are self-reported and cannot show cause [14][26].

Music and the icaros, the healing songs, matter to many people. Patients at the Takiwasi center said the songs shaped their emotions and made it feel safer to revisit painful memories [27]. More than half of nine Western participants in a Peru study mentioned the shaman and the icaros when describing their process, and the authors ask whether ritual context or placebo effects play a part [25].

Feelings

The emotional range is wide, and one night often moves through several kinds of feeling. All nine people in the Peru interview study reported emotional release, with unpleasant feelings often giving way to pleasant ones [25]. Among first-time drinkers in Brazilian churches, a majority described a strong sense of peace and harmony, and a smaller group described a mix of awe and fear tied to a sense of powerful presence [23]. PsychonautWiki lists catharsis, wellbeing, more humor and a sense of meaning [17]. Erowid lists euphoria, love, empathy and inner peace on one side, and fear, paranoia and feeling overwhelmed on the other [18].

In a retreat study of 36 people, grief, isolation and physical suffering during the experience were each linked to better mood afterward, and no one showed clinically significant deterioration; it was a small group at a modern retreat and not traditional practice [28]. Weeping and shaking are named in traditional belief as forms of purging [21].

Insight, Presences and the Edge of Death

Many people come away with a sense of having been shown something. Seven of nine people in the Peru study described personal insights about relationships, other people's motives, and ethical and spiritual matters, and three of nine described contact with spirits or entities [25]. About four in ten first-time drinkers in the Brazilian church study reported insights into their lives, relationships or behavior, many feeling the insight came from outside themselves; the authors caution that people may overvalue such insights [23]. In an older study of 25 northern Europeans, people described plant teachers, animal spirits and a felt presence of ayahuasca itself, and some read the experience as meeting God or as death and rebirth [24].

In two studies of experienced drinkers, about two thirds of 44 people and about half of 306 people reported at least one personal death experience. They rated these as extremely intense, with the self dissolving and feelings ranging from fear to joy to liberation, and most said it changed how they think about death. Having one was not linked to more

death anxiety or depression, though the authors flag reporting bias, since such experiences are valued among drinkers [15]. Ego dissolution is not universal: in one small retreat study, ratings the morning after varied widely from person to person [29]. PsychonautWiki and Erowid also list time distortion, a sense of connection to the universe, and for some people a pull toward magical thinking [17][18].

When It Is Hard

Some nights are hard, and a hard night is not always a failure. In the Global Ayahuasca Survey, about 56 percent reported psychological effects in the weeks or months afterward; most of those (about 88 percent) understood them as part of growth or integration, and about 12 percent sought professional help [30]. Most of the effects lasted under a week [12]. The reanalysis lists extreme fear during a ceremony, depression-like feelings such as hopelessness and emotional disconnection, anxiety, and spiritual distress. Extreme fear, depression-like symptoms and disconnection were tied to poorer current mental health, and people with a history of depression or anxiety were more likely to report them; the authors say some of this may be existing conditions resurfacing [14] [26].

ICEERS describes difficult psychological reactions as the main risk of ceremonial use. They usually pass during the session or soon after, and they are more likely to leave lasting effects when the session is very hard, the setting is unsafe or support is missing [19]. Among 41 Western drinkers in one interview study, two reported serious harm that the authors tied to set and setting: a prolonged psychotic-like state that needed antipsychotic treatment, and a sexual assault during a ceremony [16]. A Colombian psychologist says a hard session often brings up what is already present, such as fragility or paranoia, and that facilitators can add to harm through lack of knowledge, mixing substances or abuse of power [31]; that is one practitioner's view. Choosing a Facilitator, later in this sheet, takes this up.

Some people feel stuck, out of control, or afraid they are losing their mind or dying [18]. Some people feel very little. Erowid mentions only visual static.

What Shapes the Night

Set, setting and the people running the ceremony shape the night. In a survey of 2,751 people from Brazil and the Netherlands, better-rated settings went with fewer challenging experiences, and social atmosphere, comfort and the instructions given were among the strongest predictors; the study is self-reported and cannot show cause [32]. People in traditional settings reported less emotional distress, and people outside South America were more likely to report disconnection [14]. Western drinkers stressed the facilitator's skill, the environment and support after the ceremony [16]. Erowid notes that brews differ, since some contain extra plants [18]. Intensity also varies widely between people in the same retreat [29].

The Days After

Many people describe feeling lighter or more settled afterward. In a small retreat study, life satisfaction and decentering (stepping back from your own thoughts) rose the morning after and a week later, with no control group and high dropout [29]. In the phone-prompt retreat study, positive mood and mindfulness skills rose in daily life [28]. Erowid says effects may linger for some hours after the main experience [18].

Integration is its own work. In a qualitative analysis of 1,630 drinkers, people described integration as easy, hard or ongoing, and about a quarter called it long-term. Community, meditation, yoga, journaling, time in nature, professional support and a buffer period after ceremonies helped. Feeling misunderstood by others, fitting changed values back into work and city life, an abrupt loss of support after a retreat, and for a smaller group lasting disturbances such as sensitivity to light or sound or recurring dark imagery made it harder; some of these resolved and some did not [33]. The authors say the minority with negative or unresolved states should not be minimized [33].

How It Is Taken

Swallowed as a Brew

The plants are boiled or soaked into a tea, and it is swallowed [7]. PsychonautWiki lists oral as the only route for ayahuasca [17]. Onset and duration are in How Long It Lasts below. Purging by vomiting, and sometimes diarrhea, is common and in many traditions wanted [19][18]. The risks of this route are dehydration or over-drinking, the MAO interactions described under Contraindications, and whatever else is in the cup.

Forms You May Meet

Liquid brew from a ceremony or retreat. Analogue brews made with Syrian rue seeds or other MAO-blocking plants and a DMT plant, sometimes called mimosahuasca, and pharmahuasca, made from purified DMT with harmala alkaloids or a pharmaceutical MAO inhibitor; TripSit says pharmahuasca is not recommended [7][6]. The vine alone (tea or powder) holds no DMT and is not specifically scheduled federally, but it blocks MAO-A just the same and carries the interaction risks below [34][3]. Louisiana prohibits growing, selling or possessing listed ayahuasca plants, including Banisteriopsis species and Syrian rue, except for ornamental purposes, according to PsychonautWiki; I did not check other states [17]. Freeze-dried capsules were used in a laboratory study [4].

Other Routes

TripSit, a community wiki, says harmala alkaloids do not vaporize well [6]. A fatal nicotine poisoning followed a brew given as an enema [35].

How Long It Lasts

Sources differ. Onset, peak and length vary by source and by person. A fair summary is several hours, commonly 4 to 8 and sometimes longer, with tiredness or an altered state

afterward. Ceremonies in religious settings often run through the night and may include more than one serving, which lengthens the experience [17][7][18][1].

The MAO blocking lasts longer than the experience. One pharmacist's slide set puts the half-lives of the harmala alkaloids at about 2 to 11 hours, and says they clear 48 to 72 hours after the ceremony, with variation [36]. That is why interaction cautions run for days afterward.

About Ayahuasca and Its Effects on the Body

How It Works in the Body

In the Riba 2003 volunteer study, the blocking of MAO appeared to happen mainly in the gut and liver rather than as a whole-body shutdown of the enzyme; the urinary markers did not fall the way they do with prescription MAO inhibitors [4]. DMT peaked in the blood at a median of about 1.5 hours [4]. Callaway and colleagues measured a mean peak at about 107 minutes in 15 volunteers [37].

DMT is also cleared by an enzyme called CYP2D6, and harmine is partly cleared by it too and also blocks it [3][38]. A 2026 computer model estimated that strong CYP2D6 blockers such as fluoxetine and paroxetine would raise harmine exposure about 1.2 to 1.3 times and DMT exposure about 2.1 times. The model rests on data from six volunteers, and its authors wrote that conclusions about serotonin toxicity risk cannot be drawn from it [3].

Heart, Blood Pressure and Body Temperature

Ayahuasca raises blood pressure and heart rate modestly. In Riba 2003, diastolic pressure rose by 9 mm Hg at 75 minutes at the higher dose, and systolic pressure and heart rate rose without reaching significance [4]. In Riba 2001, pressure was elevated after all three doses without any dose differing significantly from placebo, and heart rate rose about 8 to 9 beats per minute at the two higher doses [39]. A summary of 11 trials with 108 administrations, in healthy volunteers and people with treatment-resistant depression, found mild to moderate, short-lived rises and no need for medical intervention [40].

Body temperature changed only modestly in volunteers [38]. Fever with sweating, agitation, confusion and rigid muscles is the signature of serotonin syndrome and is covered under Toxicity and the Mind [41][36].

Two of the deaths with public autopsies in the ICEERS review had cardiac causes: a heart attack, and an aortic tear linked to Marfan syndrome [13]. No controlled trial has tested ayahuasca in people with heart disease.

Vomiting, Fluids and Salt Balance

Nausea and vomiting are the most common physical effects. In the Global Ayahuasca Survey, 69.9 percent reported at least one acute physical effect, 62.0 percent reported vomiting or nausea, 4.1 percent fainted, 1.3 percent had fits or seizures, and 2.3 percent

of those who answered needed medical attention [12]. In the randomized depression trial, nausea occurred in 71 percent of the ayahuasca group against 26 percent on placebo, and vomiting in 57 percent against 0 [42]. Many traditions treat purging (la purga) as cleansing [19][18]. Dehydration and loss of appetite are listed effects [17].

The best documented fluid death is the Soul Quest case in Florida. A participant had three ayahuasca ceremonies over two days, then a kambo ceremony, drank large amounts of water before and after, and died of complications of acute hyponatremia (dangerously low sodium) with critically low potassium. A jury awarded 15 million dollars on 5/15/2024, assigned 40 percent of the liability to the church and 60 percent to its founder, and found that the founder waited about three hours to call 911 [43]. The case is as much about kambo, water loading and delayed emergency care as about ayahuasca. I found no report of hyponatremia from ayahuasca alone.

Toxicity and the Mind

The overall picture. A 2024 review of 78 articles concluded that ayahuasca and DMT are generally considered safe in controlled settings, with rare serious adverse effects in healthy people. It also found that isolated harmala alkaloids were toxic at high doses in animals (harmaline caused the most trouble) and that high doses in animals caused pregnancy loss and birth defects [44]. A 2013 overview found no peer-reviewed report of a life-threatening reaction from ayahuasca alone [38]. Gable's 2007 risk assessment extrapolated a safety margin of roughly 20-fold between ceremonial and lethal oral exposure, but that figure is scaled up from mouse data and assumes a great deal, and chronic effects were not assessed [35].

Deaths. ICEERS reviewed 58 deaths that media linked to ayahuasca between 2010 and 2022. Only 34 confirmed ayahuasca use in the hours before death, none of nine public autopsies named ayahuasca as the cause, and the contributing factors included tobacco (4 deaths), scopolamine poisoning, a likely synthetic 5-MeO-DMT overdose, excess water, drowning, and a fatal fracture during convulsions [13]. ICEERS argues for ayahuasca's safety, and the full report is in Spanish. In 2005 Sklerov and colleagues described a 25-year-old found dead after herbal extracts containing DMT, a high level of 5-MeO-DMT and harmala alkaloids [45]; six experts replied in 2006 that traditional ayahuasca holds little or no 5-MeO-DMT, so that level suggests a separate synthetic ingestion [46]. The pattern across these cases is other substances, water overload, existing illness, delayed medical care and unvetted facilitators [13][43].

Serotonin syndrome. Callaway and Grob reported three US cases in 1998 in people taking an SSRI who developed agitation, confusion, heavy sweating, apparent fever and muscle rigidity during a session; all recovered [41]. The warning signs are listed under Warning Signs near the end of this sheet [36]. The evidence is three case reports, the pharmacology, and the 2026 model.

Seizures. The Global Ayahuasca Survey found 1.3 percent reporting fits or seizures, by self-report from a non-random sample [12]. Two case reports describe convulsions after whole Syrian rue seeds [35], and one death in the ICEERS review involved a fracture during convulsions [13]. The evidence for epilepsy as a contraindication is case reports and mechanism.

Psychosis and mania. A systematic review of case reports found three case series and two case reports for ayahuasca and three for DMT. Many involved a personal or family history of psychosis or mania, or other drug use, especially cannabis, though some did not. Episodes were judged rare, no prolonged psychotic reactions appeared in screened research studies, and the authors recommend psychiatric screening and avoidance for anyone with a personal or family history of psychotic illness or non-psychotic mania [47]. Gable cites UDV data of 13 to 24 possible psychotic incidents over five years from about 25,000 servings, many resolving within hours, with missing denominators [35]. A 2015 case report describes a manic episode in a man with bipolar disorder after a ritual [48]. Trials exclude anyone with a personal or family history of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, mania or hypomania, suicide risk, or substance use disorder [42].

Hard experiences and lasting anxiety. In the Global Ayahuasca Survey, mental effects were linked to anxiety disorders, stronger acute spiritual experiences, and non-religious settings; severe effects were rare [12]. ICEERS reports that among first-time users who met criteria for a mental health disorder, 17.5 percent had intense challenging reactions, none developed persistent psychiatric symptoms, and nearly half improved. It says a hard experience does not by itself mean pathology, and that worse outcomes are more likely when the experience was especially challenging, the setting unsafe, or support missing [19].

Lingering perceptual changes. The main 2022 case series on hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD) does not mention ayahuasca [49]. Seeing or hearing things others could not was the most common single mental effect (28.5 percent) in the weeks or months afterward in the survey, mostly short-lived [12].

Suggestibility and abuse in ceremony. A person under the influence is open, suggestible and sometimes unable to speak or move. The Chacruna community guide on sexual abuse says consent is complicated when a healer holds power, and that acting on feelings of attraction or euphoria should wait until the effects fade [50]. Chacruna authors state that most reported cases involve male shamans abusing female participants [51]. Freezing during a violation is common, and abuse is never the participant's fault [50].

Legal Status

Last checked 10/27/2026.

Federal

DMT is a Schedule I controlled substance, and the Supreme Court noted that the listing covers any material, compound, mixture or preparation containing any quantity of DMT, so ayahuasca falls under Schedule I through its DMT [2][34]. The vine alone contains no DMT and is not specifically scheduled [34][7]. Erowid described the brew's federal status as ambiguous and presumptively illegal, except for members of two churches (note dated 3/18/2009) [9].

In Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao do Vegetal, decided 2/21/2006, the Supreme Court affirmed an injunction barring federal enforcement of the Controlled Substances Act against the UDV's sacramental use of hoasca. The government conceded that the law burdened the church's religion and argued interests in health, preventing diversion, and complying with the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the Court held, the government must show a compelling interest as applied to the particular claimant, and Schedule I status alone did not settle that [2]. After the ruling the UDV must register with the DEA to import hoasca and tell the DEA two weeks ahead of each shipment [10].

Santo Daime branches won narrower protection in lower courts: Church of the Holy Light of the Queen in Oregon in 2009, with states named for some branches including Oregon, California, Massachusetts and Washington [9][10][34]. In January 2020 Chacruna wrote that these protections did not extend to anyone else [10].

Other groups can petition the DEA for a religious exemption. GAO reportedly counted 24 petitions from 2016 to 2024 with none granted [52]. Since then a small number of churches have reported exemptions in 2024 and 2025, including the Church of Gaia in Spokane, with an exemption dated 5/16/2025 [53][52][34]. Sources disagree on dates and on which came first, so I am not ranking them. An exemption belongs to the organization that holds it and does not cover individuals or groups that only call themselves churches; the DEA told Soul Quest to stop and petition [10][34].

I found no recent US prosecution for importing, and enforcement from 2020 to 2026 is not well documented in the sources I could read.

Colorado

Colorado voters approved the Natural Medicine Health Act (Proposition 122) on 11/8/2022, 53.64 percent to 46.36 percent [54]. It decriminalized personal use, possession, growing and transport of DMT, ibogaine, mescaline (excluding peyote), psilocybin and psilocin for adults 21 and older [54][55]. The initiative as filed lists dimethyltryptamine in any form and allows giving natural medicine to people 21 or older without payment. It bars selling it for payment and protects growing plants or fungi capable of producing it, and the word ayahuasca does not appear in the text [55]. I read the initiative as filed, not the current codified statute as changed by SB23-290.

Whether the brew is covered is untested. A retreat vendor and two legal blogs read the protection for DMT as reaching naturally derived DMT in a brew [56][57][34]. The law firm guide to SB23-290 does not mention ayahuasca and says synthetic DMT and its analogs are excluded [58]. I found no official Colorado guidance or court ruling on the brew, the vine, or analogue brews. Federal law applies in full, and state protections do not reach federal land [56].

Selling ayahuasca remains illegal, and there are no retail sales [56][57]. The statute allows payment for harm reduction, therapy and support services, and how that fits with ceremonies is a gray area I could not resolve [55]. Sharing with anyone under 21 remains illegal [57].

The licensed healing center program covers psilocybin and psilocin only. After 6/1/2026, DMT, ibogaine and mescaline may be added if the Natural Medicine Advisory Board recommends it and the department makes rules [55][59][54]. The board turned first to ibogaine, discussing it on 6/12/2025 [60]. As far as I could find on 10/27/2026, no rule adds DMT: the state news page had nothing on it, and two private sources say no addition has been confirmed [60][56][34]. I could not reach an official 2026 advisory board record.

Contraindications

This is the part to read slowly. The harmala alkaloids block MAO-A for hours to days, so ayahuasca meets many medicines and some foods in a way that can be dangerous. Most of the list below comes from one pharmacist's slide set that discloses ties to the retreat industry, checked against Gable, dos Santos, ICEERS and PsychonautWiki [36][35][38][19][17]. No randomized trial has tested any of these interactions. Each line says how strong the evidence is: CASE means published case reports, and THEORY means expected from how MAO inhibitors work, with no ayahuasca report found. Never stop a prescribed medicine on your own. Stopping is a decision for the person who prescribes it, and Grob warns that stopping blood pressure or heart rhythm medicines can itself be risky [41].

Medications

SSRIs (fluoxetine, paroxetine, sertraline, citalopram, escitalopram and others). Serotonin syndrome. CASE (three US cases), supported by the pharmacology and the 2026 model [41][38][35][3]. This is the highest-priority interaction. Grob describes the washout as 4 to 5 weeks, and the pharmacist's slides advise waiting at least five half-lives and stopping fluoxetine at least six weeks ahead [41][36]. A prescriber has to guide any change.

SNRIs (venlafaxine, duloxetine and others). Listed with the antidepressants to avoid [36]. THEORY for ayahuasca-specific reports.

MAOIs (phenelzine, tranylcypromine, isocarboxazid, selegiline). Additive MAO inhibition, and the irreversible drugs take about two weeks to clear [36][17]. TripSit says to

avoid any medication that is contraindicated with MAOIs [6]. Reversible MAO inhibitors such as moclobemide are not covered in the sources I read. THEORY.

Tricyclic antidepressants (clomipramine, imipramine). On the avoid list [36]. THEORY.

Tramadol, meperidine, methadone and tapentadol. Opioids with serotonin activity, on the avoid list; Gable notes opiates have been implicated [36][35]. THEORY, details lacking. Other opioids are not specified in the sources.

Dextromethorphan (cough and cold products). On the avoid list and flagged by Gable and dos Santos [36][35][38]. THEORY.

St. John's wort, tryptophan and 5-HTP. St. John's wort is on the avoid list, and dos Santos names tryptophan as a serotonin syndrome risk [36][38]. 5-HTP works through the same serotonin pathway. THEORY.

Stimulants (amphetamine, methamphetamine, methylphenidate, cocaine, MDMA, ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, phentermine). The risk is a hypertensive crisis and serotonin syndrome [36][17][1]. Strong pharmacological rationale.

Lithium and ziprasidone. Listed [36]. Lithium raises seizure and serotonin concerns; no ayahuasca-specific report found. Other antipsychotics are not covered in the sources I read.

Levodopa and carbidopa (Parkinson's medicines). On the avoid list [36]. THEORY.

Other serotonin-active or releasing substances. 2C-family drugs, DOx drugs, NBOMe drugs, 5-MeO-DMT, cathinones, ergotamine, kambo and tobacco cleanses are listed [36]. Gable adds ginseng [35], and PsychonautWiki lists nicotine among the stimulants to avoid [17].

Triptans, bupropion, benzodiazepines, blood pressure medicines and beta blockers, medicines that lengthen the QT interval. They are expected to matter because of how MAO inhibitors, seizure thresholds and heart rhythm work. A physician who understands MAO inhibition should review every medicine and supplement on your list.

Conditions

Psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, mania or hypomania, personal or family. ICEERS lists serious psychiatric disorders prone to psychosis as contraindicated, the case-report review recommends avoidance, trials exclude them, and a mania case is published [19][47][42][48]. This is the best supported contraindication on the list.

Suicide risk and substance use disorder. Trial exclusions [42].

Heart and circulation, including high blood pressure. Ayahuasca has a modest pressor effect [4][38]. Wikipedia lists cardiovascular disease, endocrine and lipid disorders, glaucoma and fever as contraindications, a weak source [1].

Epilepsy and seizure disorders. CASE and THEORY, see Toxicity and the Mind [12] [35][43].

Liver disease. Acute dosing caused no clinically relevant liver enzyme changes in healthy volunteers [38]. The harmala alkaloids are processed in the liver [3]. As a contraindication this is THEORY.

Pregnancy. No published report describes toxic effects in pregnant women or their children. High continuous harmaline doses in animals caused maternal toxicity and changes in fetal development, a lower-dose rat study found none, and the 2024 review mentions pregnancy loss and birth defects in animals at high doses [38][44]. The human evidence is absent rather than reassuring, so this is unknown.

Food and the Diet

The tyramine risk (the cheese effect) is well established for prescription irreversible MAOIs, and a hypertensive crisis shows as a pounding heartbeat, sudden severe headache, pallor and chest tightness [36]. The pharmacist's slides list aged cheese, cured and fermented meats, pickled herring, soy sauce, sauerkraut, fava bean pods, tofu, yeast extract, miso, spoiled food, chocolate, tap beer, Chianti and kombucha, and say tyramine has a half-life of about 30 minutes and should clear about three hours before the ceremony [36].

TripSit says the reversible MAO blocking in ayahuasca does not require the strict diet that applies to prescription MAOIs [6]. I found no documented case of a hypertensive crisis from food after ayahuasca, though my search was not exhaustive. The 2026 model notes that irreversible MAO-A inhibition can raise tyramine sensitivity 10 to 30 times and does not claim the same for ayahuasca [3]. The traditional dieta also has spiritual, ritual and cultural meaning. The practical reading of the evidence is that the medication interactions matter far more than food, and a facilitator's medical screening matters more than a food list.

Other Substances and Combinations

Combinations of medicines get their own document; below are the ones that matter most with ayahuasca, beyond the medicines listed above. The MAO blocking lasts hours to days, so a serotonin-active drug, a stimulant or another psychoactive can be risky even when taken well before or after the ceremony [36][17][6].

Cannabis. Psychotic cases in the case-report review often involved cannabis, and dos Santos lists it as a possible interaction [47][38].

Other psychedelics. PsychonautWiki flags 5-MeO-MiPT, 2C-T-7 and AMT among others [17]; the 2C, DOx, NBOMe and 5-MeO-DMT drugs are listed under Medications above [36].

A 2024 review of interactions with classic psychedelics found one ayahuasca study among 52 [61].

Kambo. On the avoid list [36]. The Soul Quest death combined ayahuasca, kambo and water loading, and the Australian inquest case involved both [43][62]. A 2022 review of acute kambo poisoning exists, and I saw only its title [63].

Hapé (rapé) and tobacco. Hapé is often offered during ayahuasca ceremonies [64]. A CDC laboratory study reported total nicotine of 6.32 to 47.6 mg per gram in rapé products, free nicotine up to 18.5 mg per gram, and tobacco-specific nitrosamines; I read this through a secondary guide, not the study [64]. The guide advises people with high blood pressure or heart conditions, pregnant people, and people on MAO inhibitors or serotonin-active drugs to avoid it or ask a clinician [64]. Four deaths in the ICEERS review were linked to tobacco [13].

Brugmansia, Datura and scopolamine. Erowid and PsychonautWiki flag them, and the ICEERS review lists scopolamine poisoning among the deaths [17][7][13]. Thirty people needed treatment after a brew containing harmine, atropine and scopolamine [35].

Alcohol and breastfeeding. The risk with ayahuasca is unknown.

Addiction and Misuse

Physical dependence looks low to absent. Gable found no studies reporting a withdrawal syndrome after stopping DMT, little or no human tolerance to its emotional or bodily effects, and weak or mixed results in animal self-administration, and concluded the potential for dependence is minimal [35]. ICEERS reports no dependence and no tolerance in healthy volunteers, and says the vomiting and the lack of tolerance act as brakes on overuse [19]. Erowid reports no withdrawal effects [7]. In a double-blind crossover of two servings four hours apart in nine experienced users, there was no clear tolerance in psychological effects or most body measures, only in growth hormone [65]. That tested a short interval, not months of use.

A controlled study of 56 jungle-based and 71 urban ritual users against matched controls found lower scores on the alcohol and psychiatric subscales of the Addiction Severity Index, and ritual use did not appear tied to the harmful psychosocial effects typical of drugs of abuse [66]. UDV members report less alcohol and drug use, though the control groups were not always matched [35][19].

Addiction means compulsive use that continues despite harm. Misuse is using a substance in ways that raise the risk of harm, whether or not anyone is addicted. The evidence supports low addiction liability. It does not support no harm. Misuse looks like going without screening, mixing with other substances, stacking ceremonies close together (the Soul Quest participant had three in two days, then kambo; see Vomiting, Fluids and Salt Balance [43]), using ceremony to avoid ordinary life, and making big life decisions straight out of an

intense night [5]. Leaning on a facilitator or on ceremony as the only route to feeling better is a plausible risk.

Testing and Purity

What Is Really in the Brew

The alkaloid content of the vine and leaves varies a great deal, so strength differs batch to batch [6]. ICEERS names unknown source or composition as a primary physical risk [19]. Brews can carry added plants (Brugmansia, Datura, tobacco), and fraudulent shamans have been linked to deaths with Brugmansia [7][67][17]. A tonic sold as ayahuasca in the Sklerov case held a high level of 5-MeO-DMT [45][46].

Analogue brews match the MAO plus DMT mechanism with different plants, so the interaction risks are the same. Syrian rue seeds have caused convulsions and a slow heart rate in case reports [35][7].

Test Kits

Ehrlich reagent reacts with indole compounds, so it can hint that an indole such as DMT or a harmala alkaloid is present, but it cannot tell you which one, how much, or what else is in the cup, and it will not catch Brugmansia, Datura or heavy metals. That is general reagent chemistry. I did not find a verified laboratory testing service for brews, so I am not listing one.

Preparation and Integration

No dosing or timing numbers are given here. Those are left to the sources and a medical provider.

Before

Get a real medical and medication review from a clinician who understands MAO inhibition, before you book, since a review on arrival is too late to change anything. Be honest about every medicine, supplement and psychiatric condition, including family history of psychosis or bipolar disorder [47][19]. ICEERS recommends using ayahuasca only when its composition is known, in appropriate settings, with experienced guides, and with preparation and integration support [19]. Do not stop a prescribed medicine on your own [41].

Diet guidance is a mix of tradition and tyramine caution, and traditions often ask for abstinence and food limits before and for a few days after [36][6][7]. Fasting and purging raise the risk of dehydration, and the hyponatremia death shows that over-drinking is dangerous too, so ask for a hydration plan and do not push large volumes of water in either direction [43].

Ask about the emergency plan: who is sober and present, how many sitters there are for how many participants, whether anyone has first aid or medical training, and who calls 911. The Soul Quest case turned on a three-hour delay in calling 911 and on treating a medical event as spiritual [43]. A sober sitter who knows the warning signs below is worth having. The Zendo Project teaches principles of psychedelic peer support, support without trying to fix or steer, and offers a course [68].

Choosing a Facilitator

The Chacruna guide suggests checking reputation through review sites, past participants and experienced local people, and asking women in particular. It suggests choosing ceremonies where experienced women or female healers are present, and not being alone with the healer: bring a trusted companion, even to individual sessions [50].

Red flags from the guide: being overly touchy or focused on your looks; saying his wife is fine with him having sex with others; encouraging secrecy or pacts of silence; offering love magic; saying ayahuasca makes sex better; calling you special or chosen and offering status; offering other psychoactive substances as medicine, including for sexual chakra releases; and proposing sex during or right after a ceremony [50]. You can say no to any touch or stop any treatment. Common healing practices (sopladas, limpiezas, plant baths) do not involve private areas, and removing clothing is not required [50].

Retreats are unregulated and carry no permits. Untrained people may add dangerous plants such as Brugmansia and charge for brews, while traditional ayahuasqueros train for years with strict dietas [67]. That is a magazine account, so weigh it accordingly.

After

ICEERS recommends integration support after sessions, especially hard ones [19]. Chacruna advises letting euphoria and a sense of empowerment fade before decisions about relationships or sex [50]. Plan a ride home, put big life decisions on hold, line up someone you can talk to, and look for a therapist who understands psychedelics. Fireside Project takes calls during and after a trip [69].

If You Need Help Now

In a medical emergency, call 911. If you are in emotional crisis, you can call or text 988. Fireside Project has trained volunteers who talk with you by phone or text during and after a psychedelic experience, and DanceSafe sells kits for testing what you hold.

Warning Signs

Call 911 for a seizure, collapse or unresponsiveness, or fainting that does not clear quickly [12][13]. Call for chest pain, severe shortness of breath, a very fast or irregular heartbeat, a sudden severe headache, or a pounding heartbeat with pallor, which can mean a hypertensive crisis [36].

The serotonin syndrome pattern is fever above 101 F, shaking or clonus that will not stop, rigid muscles, agitation, confusion, heavy sweating, an unstable pulse, and symptoms that outlast the psychedelic experience. Mild shaking, nausea, purging and sweating that fade as the experience ends are expected [36][41].

Call 911 for extreme agitation, violence or paranoia that does not settle, and confusion that does not clear [47][36]. Call if someone is vomiting while drowsy or unable to sit up, or is choking or struggling to breathe, and put them in the recovery position while you wait. Call for confusion, severe headache, repeated vomiting or seizure after a lot of water, which can mean low sodium [43]. Extreme drowsiness, wide pupils, hot dry skin, delirium, or a slow or racing heart can mean a hidden added plant such as Brugmansia or Datura [13][35].

For suicidal thoughts or a plan, call or text 988, any hour, free and confidential [70]. Poison Help at 1-800-222-1222 answers around the clock, in over 100 languages, and can help with a suspected added ingredient or drug interaction [71]. Fireside Project at 62-FIRESIDE (623-473-7433) is a peer support line, open daily from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Pacific time, and it is not a crisis or suicide line [69]. Do not wait for a medical problem to pass, and do not treat it as only spiritual [43].

Where to Find More Information and Support

Amounts, timing and combinations are best checked against these sources and with a medical provider, because they are updated more often than this sheet. Erowid, TripSit and PsychonautWiki include user reports and community writing, so read them as experience as well as research.

Erowid: https://erowid.org

DanceSafe: https://dancesafe.org

TripSit: https://tripsit.me

PsychonautWiki: https://psychonautwiki.org

Zendo Project: https://zendoproject.org

Fireside Project: https://firesideproject.org

MAPS: https://maps.org

Poison Help: 1-800-222-1222

For Ayahuasca Questions

ICEERS publishes the Ayahuasca Safety Profile: https://www.iceers.org/en/ayahuasca-safety-profile/

ICEERS runs the Ayahuasca Defense Fund, which offers legal support (basic counseling is open to everyone except people operating unethically, and it does not handle practitioner abuse cases) [72]: https://www.iceers.org/en/how-we-help/legal-support/

Chacruna Institute publishes the community guide on sexual abuse awareness: https://chacruna.net/?p=8765

Colorado's official natural medicine program page:
https://dpo.colorado.gov/NaturalMedicine/News

Mailing Lists

Erowid Monthly, a free email list: https://www.erowid.org/about/about_announcements.shtml

Erowid Extracts, the members' newsletter: https://erowid.org/membership/

MAPS email newsletter: sign up at https://maps.org

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