Psychedelics and Cautions

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Please Read First

A few honest words before we begin. This handout is educational. It is not medical, legal or professional advice, and I am not a physician or an attorney. I gathered what is here from published harm reduction organizations, medical and legal sources, and my own training and experience, and I may have gotten something wrong. Please check anything you plan to act on with a qualified medical provider and, for questions of law, an attorney. Laws and research on psychedelics move fast, so some of this may have changed since the date above. Nothing here encourages anyone to break the law. It exists to look after 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.

My strongest suggestion is to meet with a psychedelic-informed physician for an assessment before you use any psychedelic or related substance. A good one can look at your history, your medications and your heart, which no web page can do.

Where this information came from: Harm reduction organizations such as DanceSafe, published medical references and my own training. The numbered sources are listed at the end.As with any fact you meet on social media, do your own due diligence to check it for accuracy.

Medications and Conditions That Call for Care

Some medicines and health conditions change the whole picture. Doctors call these contraindications, which means a reason something is risky for one person even when it is fine for another. These are commonly reported cautions, and the list is not complete.

- Lithium has been reported to carry a serious risk of seizures when combined with psychedelics, based on a review of online experience reports. [1, 2]
- Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), which include some older antidepressants and the vine used in ayahuasca, can interact dangerously with many psychedelics and with MDMA. [2, 3]
- SSRIs and other antidepressants can dull the effects of some psychedelics and raise the risk of serotonin syndrome with others,

especially MDMA. [3, 4] Please never stop an antidepressant on your own; tapering is something to do with your prescriber.
- Tramadol lowers the seizure threshold and adds to serotonin risk. [5]
- Stimulants add strain to the heart, and so do heart conditions and high blood pressure. [2, 6, 7] Liver problems and seizure disorders also call for care. [6]
- If you or someone in your family has a history of psychosis or bipolar mania, extra caution is wise, and a conversation with a physician first is wiser. [2, 6]
- Alcohol, benzodiazepines and opioids combined with ketamine can slow breathing to a dangerous level. [8]

Cautions for Specific Substances

These are the best documented pairings, listed by what you are planning to take. Much of the evidence is case reports and self-reported accounts, so read each line as a reason to ask a pharmacist or physician, not as the last word. Please never stop or change a prescribed medicine on your own.

- **LSD:** tricyclic antidepressants (amitriptyline, clomipramine, imipramine, nortriptyline) are reported fairly consistently as very bad in combination. SSRIs and MAOIs are reported to blunt the effects, and antipsychotics can block them. Lithium is the seizure concern above. [1, 12, 14]
- **Psilocybin:** MAOIs are generally contraindicated, with a risk of high blood pressure and overheating and a long washout period. Tricyclic antidepressants may weaken the effects and add to swings in blood pressure and heart rate. Antipsychotics can reverse the effects, stimulants are avoided because they raise heart rate and blood pressure, and St. John's wort is on the avoid list. For SSRIs the evidence is mixed, and the serotonin syndrome risk is described as theoretical. [13, 15]
- **MDMA:** DanceSafe names the MAOIs Nardil, Parnate and Marplan as very dangerous, because of serotonin syndrome, which can be fatal. Ritonavir, an HIV medicine, and other medicines processed by the same liver enzyme (CYP2D6), including codeine and DXM, the cough medicine ingredient, can push MDMA to dangerous levels; at least one death is described with ritonavir. Sources disagree about SSRIs: some warn of serotonin syndrome, and DanceSafe says they mainly blunt MDMA. The Mayo Clinic also lists lithium, tramadol, St. John's wort, triptans and linezolid among medicines linked to serotonin syndrome. [4, 11, 16]

- **Ketamine:** opioids, benzodiazepines, alcohol and other sedatives add to ketamine's sedation and can slow breathing. Stimulants and MAOIs can raise blood pressure further. [8, 17]
- **Ayahuasca and other MAOI plants:** the vine acts as an MAOI, so every MAOI caution on this sheet applies to it. [2, 3]
- **Psychedelics with each other:** two substances that both act on serotonin, such as MDMA with psilocybin or LSD, can raise the risk of serotonin syndrome and add strain to the heart. Take one thing at a time. [3, 7]

Combining Substances

Two substances together can do more than the sum of what each does alone. This is called synergy, and it is how an ordinary dose of one thing becomes dangerous beside another. Combined effects can be strong and unpredictable, and no list covers every pair. Look up any combination you are considering in a reliable interaction chart. When in doubt, take one thing at a time.

Research on how psychedelics interact with other medicines is young. Most of what is known comes from case reports, online experience reports and small studies, and there is far more that nobody has studied than anyone knows. A combination missing from this sheet is not a combination that is safe. Caution is the best way to proceed: take one thing at a time, and ask a pharmacist or physician about every medicine and supplement you take. These pairings are among the ones known to go badly:

- **MAOIs with 5-MeO-DMT: the ayahuasca vine, Syrian rue and other harmala plants act as MAOIs. Taken by mouth together with 5-MeO-DMT, the pairing has been linked to severe high blood pressure, overheating and serotonin syndrome. [18]**
- **MDMA with DXM, the cough medicine ingredient, or with tramadol: both are on the Mayo Clinic's list of medicines linked to serotonin syndrome, and DanceSafe warns about DXM with MDMA. [11, 16]**
- **Stimulants such as cocaine, amphetamine and methylphenidate with any psychedelic: more anxiety, and heart strain as heart rate and blood pressure climb. [7, 15, 20]**
- **Cannabis or alcohol with a psychedelic: effects can come on stronger and less predictably, with more anxiety, paranoia or panic. [20]**
- **Ibogaine with a heart that has any rhythm trouble: ibogaine can lengthen the heart's QT interval and, rarely, cause cardiac arrest. A toxicology bulletin advises an ECG for anyone who has taken it.**

Ask a physician about every other medicine you take before using it. [19]

Street Substances

A pill, powder or tab bought on the street may hold something other than what was promised, including fentanyl and stimulants, and new synthetic substances appear faster than research can follow them. Testing kits catch some contaminants and miss others, so they lower the risk without erasing it. [9, 10] Buy kits from dance safe.

If You Need Help Now

Call 911 for high fever, seizure, confusion that does not clear, a racing heart that will not settle, severe muscle rigidity, trouble breathing or loss of consciousness. These can signal serotonin syndrome, overheating or a dangerous interaction. [11] Please do not wait to see whether it passes. Getting help comes first.

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.

References

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