



Understanding The Nature of Synthetic Drugs

By

Gary Hilliard BS, LCDC

Amanda Windham AAS, LCDC-I

We all know how difficult it is to keep up with technology these days. It appears the drug scene is growing even faster, prompting professionals to work hard to keep up with the trends in "Designer Drugs". This is most evident in relation to synthetic drugs. One such drug is **synthetic marijuana**, which came onto the U.S. drug scene around 2009.

Synthetic marijuana is the result of an attempt to supply the public with a euphoric feeling similar to that of cannabis while avoiding the current drug laws. The product itself has turned out to be extremely harmful on both a psychological and physical level. The result has been the production of a chemical that has very little similarity to the effects of cannabis with a very strong foundation for dependence.

Currently, synthetic marijuana is rivaling alcohol and cannabis in popularity among high school students. The drug's popularity has been the result of its easy accessibility. The drug is most often sold in "Smoke" shops that are spotted throughout any retail area. These shops specialize in selling cannabis paraphernalia and other drug related items.



What's In Synthetic Marijuana?

There are numerous chemicals that are used in the production of synthetic marijuana. The main ingredient is Cannabicyclohexanol. This ingredient is the primary precipitator for the euphoric feeling the drug produces. Other chemicals include, but are not limited to JWH-073, JWH-018, and AM-2200. The exact types and combinations of chemicals often change based on the supplier of the drug and the timing of when the drugs were produced. These chemicals are often used to lace herbs which gives it a "natural" appearance. Unfortunately, there is nothing natural about these drugs.

Synthetic Marijuana Linked To Kidney Damage

Synthetic marijuana is sold under various names such as Spice, Herbal Incense, Black Mamba, Bombay Band, and K2. In chemical dependency counseling we are seeing more and more clients seeking treatment for the drug and the behaviors associated with it. The drug itself produces a strong mental addiction. This mental addiction has shown to be as strong as any other drug that is available for use. The negative side effects produced by the drug include nausea, kidney damage, vomiting, acute psychosis, and a very aggressive personality after use that tends to persist until the next usage. In the detox phase of the drug, there is a persistent cough that expels a tar like substance that often builds up in the lungs.

What are Bath Salts?

Another drug that has infiltrated the drug scene recently is "Bath

Salts". The initial term was derived from the appearance of the drug, which is similar to bath salts that someone would actually use in a bath tub for a soothing technique. The physical appearance of this drug is small white crystals that are usually packaged under names such as Blue, Flash, Vanilla Sky, Artic Blast, Route 66, Ocean Snow, Ivory Wave and White Lightening. Bath Salts is to cocaine what synthetic marijuana is to cannabis. The initial purpose of the drug was to produce a feeling similar to cocaine; however the result was a much quicker and intensive high and a stronger mental obsession to repeat the use.



What's In Bath Salts?

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), Bath Salts typically contain chemicals, such as methylenedioxypropylone (MPDV), mephedrone, and pyrovalerone. Chemically, these substances are similar to amphetamines and MDMA (ecstasy). These chemicals tend to raise the levels of dopamine in the brain, which causes the feelings of euphoria. In addition, like synthetic marijuana, the exact makeup of these drugs varies based on the particular manufacturer. As a result, users really have no way of knowing the exact chemical makeup of the drugs they are consuming.

New Dimensions Can Help If You or Someone You Know Is:

- Depressed or Suicidal
- Stuck and having difficulty making changes
- Dealing with trauma
- Struggling with Panic Attacks
- Having difficulty working or going to school
- Struggling with addictions or substance abuse
- Cutting or doing other self-destructive behaviors
- Struggling with anger issues
- Struggling to get medications stabilized

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Bath Salts Can Be Highly Addictive

According to NIDA, recent studies indicate that Bath Salts may be even more addicting than Methamphetamine. Some studies have indicated that Bath Salts have 10 times the potency of cocaine, when measuring the levels of dopamine after use. Bath Salts can cause chest pains, increased heart rate, agitation, hallucinations, paranoia, and delusions. In addition, Bath Salts can increase symptoms related to existing mental health issues. For example, a bipolar patient may experience increased mania when using Bath Salts. Overall, in the treatment community, we are finding that the negative mental effects of these drugs are taking longer to repair when compared to drugs of a more natural origin.



Clear Lake Location:
1345 Space Park Dr., Ste. C
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Emerging Drug Abuse Trends

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, there are several new drugs that are appearing within major metropolitan areas. More information about these drugs can be found at www.drugabuse.gov.

1. **Krokodil** - This is a homemade synthetic drug called desmorphine. It has heroin-like qualities and is made by combining various toxic chemicals, including lighter fluid and industrial cleaners, with codeine tablets. This drug gets its name from the scaly, gray-green dead skin that sometimes forms as a result of the drug use. This dead flesh can become gangrenous and result in amputations in order to save the drug abuser's life. This drug has been used as a heroin substitute in Russia for the last decade and has recently begun to appear within the United States.
2. **N-bomb** - This is a synthetic hallucinogen that is being sold as a legal substitute for LSD or mescaline. It is sometimes referred to as "Legal Acid", "Smiles," or "251" and is typically distributed as a powder, liquid or soaked into blotter paper. These drugs are more powerful than LSD and can cause seizures, heart attacks, arrested breathing, and even death.
3. **Syrup, Purple Drank, Sizzurp, or Lean** - Soda mixed with prescription-strength cough syrup containing codeine and promethazine has become increasingly popular with youth in several areas of the country. The combination of the codeine which is an opioid and the promethazine which is an antihistamine can create a powerful sedative effect. This drug presents a high risk of fatal overdose because of its depressing effect on the central nervous system, especially when mixed with alcohol.
4. **Molly** - Molly is a slang term for "molecular" and refers to the pure crystalline powder form of MDMA, which in pill form is known as ecstasy. This drug has seen a resurgence in usage over the last several years. Side effects of MDMA include confusion, depression, and sleep disturbance. In addition, many forms of MDMA are being mixed with other chemicals including those found in bath salts. As a result, users often expose themselves to a combination of risks when using these forms of drugs.

Treatment for Synthetic Drug Abusers

Most people seek treatment during times of crisis. Crisis may occur as a result of an arrest, legal problems, work performance problems, school performance issues, family problems or relationship problems. Individuals that are abusing drugs and/or alcohol tend to be most receptive to receiving help once the crisis occurs. As a result, it is important to intervene quickly to get the addict or alcoholic into treatment.

Treatment Helps

Treatment for synthetic drugs is identical to the treatment of any other addictive substance. Treatment involves helping individuals accept responsibility for their actions and then learn the tools they need to replace the use of the drugs with more effective ways of living.

What to Expect When Treatment Begins

When an individual begins treatment, they are frequently fearful of the treatment process and are often struggling with a variety of feelings including guilt, shame, anger, depression, and anxiety. Many people find it reassuring when they enter into a program and discover that they are not alone in their recovery and that others have truly "been where they are now." Once an individual becomes engaged in treatment they have an opportunity to:

- Develop an understanding of the Disease concept of addiction.
- Develop an understanding of the 12-step program and begin to work the initial steps of the program.
- Develop an understanding of the barriers to recovery.
- Learn to identify the triggers that lead to relapse and develop a relapse prevention plan.
- Learn how to change self-defeating thoughts.
- Learn how to identify and change thinking errors that lead to relapse.
- Develop a support system and become actively engaged with the 12-step community.
- Learn how to accept responsibility for recovery and create a lifestyle of honesty and integrity.
- Learn how to manage feelings more effectively.

Synthetics and the Law

Federal law now bans the 5 major chemicals that are frequently found within synthetic marijuana and Bath Salts. (JWH-018, JWH-073, JWH-200, CP-47,497, and cannabicyclohexanol. Unfortunately, this has not been enough. Manufacturers have simply altered the chemical makeup of their products in order to make it "legal" again. As a result, lawmakers find it difficult to effectively regulate synthetic drugs. In order to address this problem, lawmakers are moving away from laws that concentrate on the specific compounds and instead are developing laws that focus on how the drug affects the person.

Remember:

**Recovery Works When
You Work The Steps of
Recovery**