

Medicine ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY

MDMA BASICS:

This medicine was developed by Merck Pharmaceutical company in 1912. Its effects were discovered as a side effect and it did not have much use until the 1970s/1980s when it was used to enhance certain aspects of psychotherapy. MDMA was made illegal in various countries after 1985 yet it has continued to be worked with underground in various psychedelic psychotherapy contexts.

From the 1980's it became associated with dance music and parties in popular culture. In these contexts what is called MDMA is sold mixed with other substances such as ephedrine, amphetamine, methamphetamine, Ketamine and others. What is sold at festivals and parties is not what is used in research trials and MDMA psychotherapy.

Since the late 1990's academic papers have shown a continuing interest in using MD in psychotherapeutic contexts. Since the 2000's a number of published research papers have forwarded the idea that MDMA has a great potential for healing. As of 2019 Stage 3 FDA approved trials are being undertaken and MDMA is a prescription medicine for PTSD in some states in the US since 2022.

MDMA PHARMACOLOGY AND ITS RELATION TO HEALING TRAUMA:

MDMA is a psychedelic compound in the Entactogen class. MD binds to the serotonin reuptake transporter, similar to the approved psychiatric medications for depression and anxiety, which are both selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Unlike SSRIs, MDMA is a potent releaser of monoamines and at higher doses evokes sustained glutamate release in the hippocampus????? These combined effects facilitate the experience of learning to live without fear by triggering neuroplasticity (the ability for the brain to create new pathways ie. for us to learn new ways to be) and assists with the recoding of traumatic memories thus treating the core emotional/psychological wounding and trauma.

MDMA produces prosocial effects whereby participants feel safe within the therapeutic environment, which counteracts the avoidance and hyperarousal which can occur in therapy when engaging core wounding. The experience of trauma and PTSD increases activity in the amygdala (our fight/flight/freeze centre), causing heightened encoding of fearful memories and decreasing blood flow to the prefrontal cortex; making us more emotional and less able to reason or be mindful. In contrast, MDMA acutely decreases activity in the amygdala and hippocampus, and increases blood flow to the prefrontal cortex. MDMA also increases levels of the hormones oxytocin, prolactin and arginine vasopressin, which helps to increase trust, bonding and reduce reactivity to threatening cues such as traumatic memories. All this extra trust and less reactivity allows therapy to go deeper, and to more easily access core emotional/psychological material.

The combined neurobiological effects of MDMA can increase compassion for self and others, and diminish psychological defences and fear of emotional injury, while enhancing communication and empathy. The subjective effects of MDMA may therefore create a desirable psychological state that enhances the therapeutic process.

MDMA is currently being used to treat combat veterans in Israel. Various Veteran organizations across the world are advocating for the use of this medicine in treating trauma.

MDMA RESEARCH TRIALS.

Currently MDMA is going through a MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies www.MAPS.org) sponsored Stage 3 research trials in the US as a treatment for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Stage 3 research is the step before a new drug goes to the FDA for approval as a new medication. After the successful results of the Stage 2 trials, MDMA was given 'Breakthrough Status' which means its success in the trials was recognized it was expedited by the FDA on its research journey towards approval as a new medicine. With the stage 2 trials, one month after MDMA assisted psychotherapy ended, 43% of trial participants no longer met criteria for PTSD. 12 mths after MDMA assisted psychotherapy 76% of participants no longer had PTSD. These stats are powerful and there is nothing close to these numbers in the research literature. This research provides strong evidence that chronic PTSD, regardless of its cause, is treatable with MDMA assisted psychotherapy and associated preparatory and integrative psychotherapy. There are other trials occurring for MDMA and autism, alcohol dependence, anxiety and a few others. Check out MAPS for further info: www.maps.org

PSYCHEDELIC RESURGENCE AND UNDERGROUND PSYCHEDELIC PSYCHOTHERAPY:

There has been a massive psychedelic resurgence on many cultural levels. From greater awareness of psychedelic medicines potential for healing, growth and much else, to interest in cross-cultural traditions of psychedelic plant and animal use and their relationship to environmental awareness, to research trials within academia with a wide number of psychedelics. Mushroom and MDMA assisted psychedelic psychotherapy is but one facet of this resurgence.

Psychedelics were used in psychotherapy from the 1950s to the 1970s before the war on drugs rendered research and therapeutic work difficult. What is not well known is that psychedelic psychotherapy has continued underground unabated since the 1970s. This tradition has developed treatment protocols, has produced books and transmitted knowledge and data. Underground psychedelic psychotherapy continues to grow, developing with published research and writings, knowledge sharing and networking at conferences, producing and sharing practitioner research data, developing novel protocols depending on therapeutic context and client/issue, becoming a stronger community with support of the internet, aligning with and exploring resonant therapies, and gaining greater status with the help of the many brave souls bringing this work to where it is needed.

EFFECTS OF MDMA:

The subjective effects of MDMA create a productive psychological state enhances the therapeutic process. The acute effects of MDMA may include:

- Increased feelings of empathy and compassion
- Enhanced abilities of communication and introspection
- Reduced feelings of fear
- Increased sociability and extroversion
- Increased interpersonal trust
- Alert state of consciousness
- Increased feelings of well-being

TRADITIONS, TREATMENT PHILOSOPHY AND ORIENTATION OF PSYCHOTHERAPY:

MDMA has been used in various therapeutic contexts over the years including relationship/couples counselling, various forms of group psychotherapy, general psychotherapy and now, with a strong focus on healing trauma and PTSD in individual sessions.

The foundation for the therapeutic approach used in this work has been laid down and developed over the last 40 years. The basic premise of this treatment approach is that the therapeutic effect is not due simply to the physiological effects of the medicine; rather, it is the result of an interaction the effects of the medicine, the therapeutic setting and the mindsets of the participant and the therapists. Furthermore, there is a trust in the healing process of the client: therapists follow the client's process trusting the intelligence of the medicine and the client's healing process, however that might look...and the healing process often looks different according to different clients.

MDMA produces an experience that temporarily reduces fear, increases the range of positive emotions toward self and others, and increases interpersonal trust without clouding the sensorium or inhibiting access to emotions. MDMA catalyzes therapeutic processing by allowing participants to stay emotionally engaged while revisiting traumatic experiences without being overwhelmed by anxiety or other painful emotions. Frequently, participants are able to experience and express fear, anger, and grief as part of the therapeutic process with less likelihood of either feeling overwhelmed by these emotions or of avoiding them by dissociation or emotional numbing.

In addition, MDMA enables a heightened state of empathic rapport that facilitates the therapeutic process and allows for a corrective emotional experience of secure attachment and collaboration with the therapists. At some point during the MDMA experience, feelings of empathy, love, and deep appreciation often emerge in conjunction with a clearer perspective of the trauma as a past event and a heightened awareness of the support and safety that exist in the present. Research participants have said that being able to successfully process painful emotions during MDMA-assisted psychotherapy has given them a template for feeling and expressing pain that has changed their relationship to their emotions.

MDMA may also provide access to meaningful spiritual and other transpersonal experiences, release of tensions in the body, and a sense of healing on a non-verbal level that are incompletely understood, but are considered important by many participants.

The therapists work with the participant to establish a sense of safety, trust, and openness, as well as to emphasize the value of trusting the wisdom of the participant's innate capacity to heal the wounds of trauma. The therapeutic relationship should be oriented toward a general healing for the client, who should feel safe enough in the therapists' presence to open fully to new and challenging experiences. Establishing these conditions requires that the participant feel they are informed about the parameters of treatment before each MDMA-assisted session, and then that appropriate support following is provided after the session so that the experience can be successfully integrated.

Following the MAPS research and treatment protocols client and therapist agree that that the therapist can express the issues that you have brought to the session to work on. Sometimes this occurs but often the medicine takes you where you need to go without much guidance from the therapist. Mostly a lot of space is given for you to connect to, feel and express your emotions. Sometimes various interventions are made to support you to deepen your experience. This may be getting you to feel into a memory, to connect to your body, dialogue with various parts of yourself and imaginal others, and various other interventions that are apt in the moment.