

Designer Drug Abuse

The drug market includes a vast array of controlled substances, which are classified by the Drug Enforcement Administration using a spectrum of five schedules designed to rank substances by their likelihood to be abused or, similarly, their addictive qualities and to what extent they can be used for medicinal purposes.

Outside of these five schedules, the world of drug creation by way of modification to these existing controlled substances expands at a rapid pace to provide drug suppliers and drug users with products that are designed to elude regulation and law enforcement, thus keeping drug suppliers profitable and drug users busy with new and dangerous addictions.

These products are informally referred to as “designer drugs”. They are created to have similar mind and body-altering properties to drugs already being controlled, but are *designed* and chemically constructed, or altered enough that their chemical makeup cannot be considered illegal. Many of them may begin as a controlled substance. They can be crafted from a naturally occurring chemical or can be developed from already synthetic origins. The goal is that their new chemical fingerprint is difficult to trace back to the ‘mother’ illegal substance.

It is thought that the term “designer drug” glorifies and glamorizes an already deceptively intriguing industry, bringing to mind haute couture and hand-crafted elegance; and so the Drug Enforcement Administration refers to these ever-evolving, newly birthed substances as Controlled Substance Analogues.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has attempted to extend their reach over the growth and changing nature of the controlled substances analogue market by writing a provision into the Controlled Substances Act ([21 USC, Section 813](#)), stating, “A controlled substance analogue shall, to the extent intended for human consumption, be treated, for the purposes of any Federal law as a controlled substance in schedule I”.

Examples of Designer Drugs, or Controlled Substance Analogues

One of the most widely known and referenced designer drugs is Ecstasy, or 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine. Ecstasy is a derivative of stimulant Schedule III substance Amphetamine and hallucinogenic Schedule I substance Mescaline. As with many drugs, it has a varied history involving different degrees of interest and research by legitimate chemists and was thought to be therapeutic for its positive mind-altering effects, including stress reduction and being able to better access one’s personal source of intimate feelings. It was placed on the DEA’s Controlled Substances list as a Schedule I product (the most likely to be abused and the least applicable to medical uses) in 1985. While this status has not provided a significant amount of controversy—many people have argued for its therapeutic qualities, and therefore its possible medicinal use—it remains a Schedule I substance today.