



MAGIC MUSHROOMS

Hallucinogenic mushrooms grow wild in the UK in autumn. The type most commonly used is the liberty cap (*Psilocybe semilanceata*) (above left) but fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) (above right) may also be taken.

The main active ingredients in the liberty cap are psilocybin and psilocin. In fly agarics the main active ingredients are muscimol and ibotenic acid.

Liberty caps can be eaten raw but are often dried. They can then be smoked or added to drinks such as tea.

The effects of hallucinogenic mushrooms are similar to those of a mild dose of LSD and can vary depending on the mood, situation and expectation of the user.

Effects come on after about half an hour and last up to 9 hours, depending on how many are taken. Users often laugh a lot and feel more confident. Some people feel sick and suffer from stomach aches. Higher doses result in a mild to moderate trip with visual and sound distortions.



The law

Hallucinogenic mushrooms are controlled as a class A drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act. Maximum penalties are 7 years imprisonment and a fine for possession, and life imprisonment and a fine for supply. However, maximum sentences are unlikely to be given in practice.

Popularity

According to Home Office statistics published in 2016, the use of magic mushrooms amongst 16-59 year olds in England and Wales was 0.4%. (1.3% amongst 16-24 year olds). This is a slight reduction on previous years.



Risks and harm reduction



A bad trip can be very frightening. This is more likely to happen with high doses and where the user already feels anxious. For this reason it is best to be with people you trust and in a safe place if you plan to take mushrooms.

In the UK there are many fungi growing wild, some of which are poisonous leading to stomach upsets, coma and even death when eaten. Never consume mushrooms that have not been positively identified.

As with all drugs it is best to start with a small dose.