


More Than A Trip: Psychedelic Drugs Being Used To Help People Quit Smoking In Just One Dose

By [Denise Koch](#) February 10, 2020 at 11:20 pm Filed Under: [Health](#), [Johns Hopkins](#), [Local TV](#), [psilocybin](#), [Psychedelic drugs](#), [Quit Smoking](#), [Research](#), [Talkers](#)

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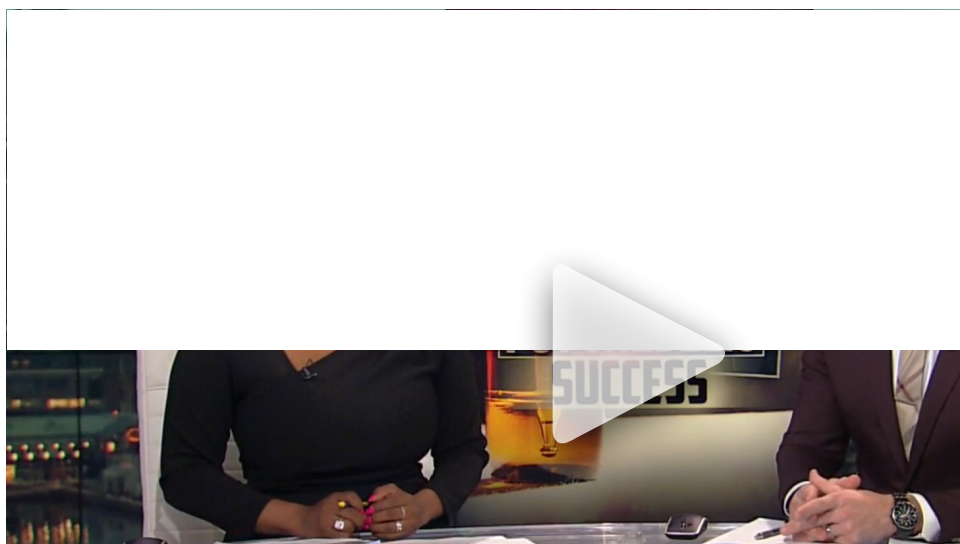
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BALTIMORE (WJZ) – When most people think of psychedelic drugs, they think of hippies in the sixties tripping on LSD or magic mushrooms. But at Johns Hopkins, fascinating research is being done using hallucinogens as medicine – and the results are promising, particularly when using psilocybin to treat addiction.

Davi Peterson was a very heavy smoker for over 25 years. After years of struggling to quit, she volunteered for a study at Johns Hopkins Behavioral Biology Research Center using the hallucinogen psilocybin.

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“I tried everything and I was starting to think that I would never be able to stop, so I went for it,” Peterson said.

So after some pre-counseling, Peterson got her first dose of psilocybin.



Davi Peterson

Psilocybin is a naturally occurring psychedelic compound found in more than 200 species of mushrooms. It and other hallucinogenic drugs target the brain’s serotonin 2A receptors.

“It kind of sets off a cascade of activity in the brain that’s very different than what’s happening when we’re normal and awake,” said [Albert Garcia-Romeu, PhD](#).

For Peterson, the effect was immediate and lasted over five hours.

“It started very quickly – kinda like being launched out of a space shuttle or something hurling through space,” she said. “It was very dramatic and very quick.”

“Time and space changes completely,” Peterson continued. “[It was] one of the most intense experiences of my life and it probably always will be.”

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“A lot of time they’re describing something that can be both overwhelming, but also positive and potentially life-changing,” Garcia-Romeu added.

In the fifties and sixties, much research was done with hallucinogenic drugs, studying their effects on the brain and behavior. But that all came to a halt, when in 1971, President Richard Nixon launched what’s become known as the “war on drugs.”

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But in 2000, restrictions on testing were lifted and now Johns Hopkins leads the world in research into the possible physical and mental benefits of psychedelic drugs such as psilocybin.

If you look at the two images below – on the left is a brain without the drug and on the right, is a brain on psilocybin.

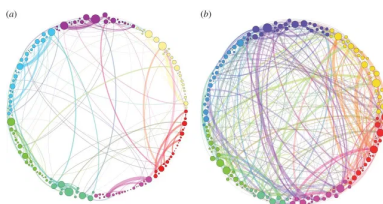


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There's far more connectivity on the right that may allow for a brief period of plasticity or a period in which the brain can change the way it's connected. In other words, it can interrupt old patterns, well-worn neuro pathways, or habits.



Simplified illustration of the connections tracked while receiving the placebo (a) and the psilocybin (b). Image credit: Petri et al., 2014.

“People will often come out of these sessions describing changes in their way of thinking, their way of relating to the people around them,” said Garcia-Romeu.

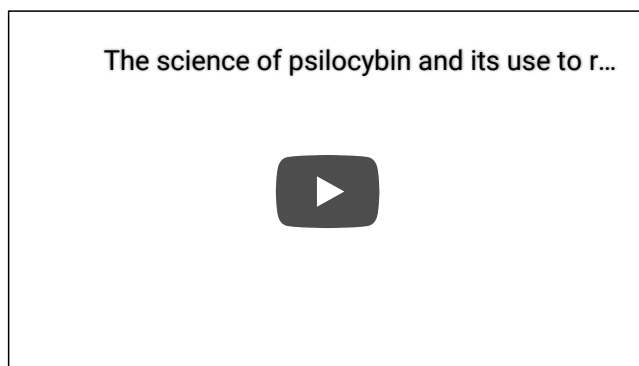
Hallucinogenics were a part of the social fabric of the turbulent sixties, but this study is not about recreational drug use — it's controlled and scientific.

WJZ was not allowed to show you a real session, so Denise Koch went through a mock session with a researcher. Here's what happens: you take a psilocybin pill and lie on a couch. There's music and the researcher will give you eyeshades, headphones and a blanket, while you go through the five- to six-hour trip.

They will make sure participants know they are safe, sometimes holding their hand or sitting with them, to help them move through the difficult experience.

Since Hopkins started its research, 700 people have gone through the process.

A pilot study saw that 80% of participants quit smoking after one dose of psilocybin and research on 51 cancer patients showed the drug decreased anxiety and depression in 80% of those tested.



“They do challenge us to reexamine our preconceptions about the way the world works and what, really is our place in the world,” Garcia-Romeu said.

Right now, the Behavioral Biology Center is recruiting for studies using psilocybin in people with early stages of Alzheimer's, anorexia-nervosa or major depression.

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If you're interested in participating, [click here](#) to go to Hopkins' website. Click the "Research" tab to apply.



Cicadas Are Finally Gone, But They Left A Little Parting Gift

After a noisy few weeks, the cicadas have finally cleared out but not without leaving us with a parting gift.

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