

What is wood lovers paralysis?

24 MAY 2022 | NEW ZEALAND



Taking psilocybin mushrooms (aka magic mushrooms) comes with a number of risks, but one effect more common in New Zealand and Australia remains a mystery...

Magic mushrooms refers to mushrooms that contain the psychedelic psychoactive compound psilocybin. They are also known as shrooms, mushies, psilocin, psilocybin, cubensis, liberty caps, golden tops, or blue meanies.

They are usually eaten, mixed with food, or brewed like tea for drinking.

Psilocybin is a hallucinogen, meaning it can cause someone to see, hear, and feel sensations that aren't actually real. The effects however vary between types of mushrooms and can also be impacted by environmental factors.

While magic mushrooms grow wild here in New Zealand, it is a Class A drug. That means possession carries a maximum penalty of 6 months in prison, and/or a \$1,000 fine.

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So, what is wood lovers paralysis?

Wood lovers paralysis refers to a phenomenon where muscle weakness occurs a few hours after taking magic mushrooms. It's so-called because it appears to be caused exclusively by mushrooms that grow on wood.

There is currently no scientific explanation for why this happens, and very little is known about the effects. It seems most common in New Zealand and Australia, and is often linked to three species of mushrooms: *Psilocybe azurescens*, *Psilocybe cyanescens*, and *Psilocybe subaeruginosa*. These species are very closely related. They're usually foraged outside and have a high psilocybin content.

Wood lovers paralysis can come on very quickly, but generally seem to come on a few hours after consumption. Reports suggest people feel weakness in their facial muscles first, but it can also start in the feet or hands. For some people, this weakness will spread across their whole body, leaving them completely paralysed – they're totally unable to move for up to several hours. Generally, people report that they would be able to co-ordinate movement without difficulty if not for the weakness.

[Vice](#) has shared a number of first-hand reports of this effect:

“I didn’t think I was actually going to wake up,” he recalls. “My hands were all like claws and my jaw felt like it was sitting on the side of my face.” He decided he’d try and sleep it off—but walking the 200 metres to his car took him an hour, and when he got there, he couldn’t even open it. “There was just no comprehension between my brain and my hands,” he says. “I knew what I had to do but [my body] just wouldn’t do it.”

The Facebook group Psychedelic Mushrooms of Australia and New Zealand (PMANZ) and the Australian Psychedelic Society (APS) [designed a survey](#) in an effort to learn more about this phenomenon.

While so little is known about this effect, it's important that people are really aware of the risks of mushrooms and the potential for accidents. While no drug use is the safest option, there are some steps that can help reduce the risks:

- ❖ Lower dosages usually pose less risk. Avoid repeated dosing.
- ❖ Avoid mixing drugs (including alcohol) as the combined effects can be unpredictable and increase risk.
- ❖ Be aware of your surroundings - try to stay in a safe and calm environment.
- ❖ As with all drugs, it's better to have people around that you trust and have knowledge of [first aid](#).

If you think someone is suffering a medical event, call 111 immediately and ask for an ambulance.

What are some of the other risks of magic mushrooms?

You can read more about the effects and risks of taking magic mushrooms [here](#).

While it's often thought that magic mushrooms are “safer” or produce a “milder” experience than other hallucinogens like [LSD](#), it's important to remember the only safe drug use is not to use drugs at all.

Magic mushrooms are just as unpredictable as other drugs. The amount of psilocybin a mushroom contains can vary a lot, so it's hard to anticipate the intensity of the effects or how long it will last. In rare cases, use can lead to seizures or heart problems.

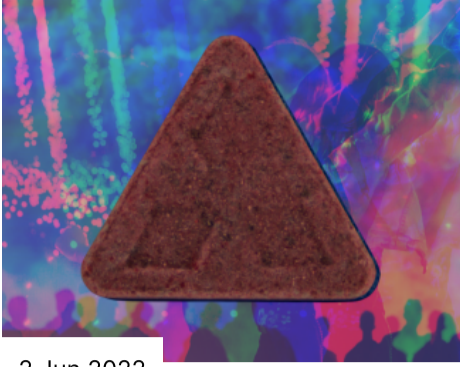
Another big risk is that magic mushrooms look very similar to other poisonous mushrooms, and making that mistake can lead to severe illness, organ damage, and even death.

The National Poisons Centre has some [helpful resources](#) for dealing with mushrooms. **If someone has eaten an unknown mushroom, immediately call them on 0800 POISON / 0800 764 766 for specific advice on what to do. Don't wait for symptoms to start!**

If you're worried about your own drinking or drug taking, you can reach out to the [Alcohol Drug Helpline](#) on 0800 787 797, or text 8681. You'll be able to speak with a trained counsellor who can provide you with helpful information, insight and support. They're available 24/7, all calls are free and confidential. You can also chat to the Alcohol Drug Helpline team online through the website.

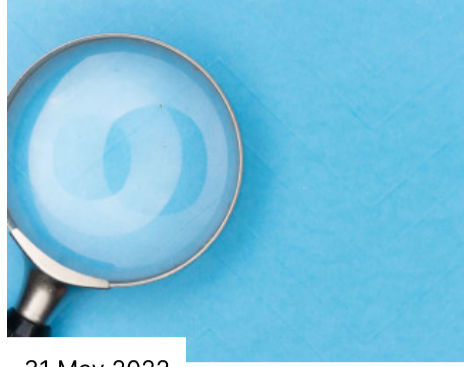
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