

## The New High: Synthetic Drugs and Drug Trends

*By Dr. Edward Zawadzki*

While the news may be filled with stories about heroin and cocaine addiction, an equally pressing issue in America is the growing use of new synthetic drugs. Names like Meow Meow, Dewshine, K2 and bath salts are all part of a disturbing trend toward a diversifying drug market.

Dr. Michael H. Baumann, author of *The Changing Face of Recreational Drug Use*, writes that these so-called “designer drugs,” “legal highs” or “research chemicals” are collectively known as new psychoactive substances (NPS), and are synthetic alternatives to traditional illegal drugs. Many are cheap and difficult to detect via traditional toxicology screens, thus allowing users and sellers to operate beyond the law.

These drugs tend to fall within three categories, according to Baumann: stimulant-like NPS (e.g., bath salts), marijuana-like NPS (e.g., spice) and LSD-like NPS (e.g., N-bombs). Even more concerning is the increasing availability of these toxic chemicals.

Very similar to narcotics and hallucinogens, the chemical structures of synthetic drugs are typically altered to avoid current drug laws. Due to the manipulation of the drugs, they’re often sold online or in head shops. But just because synthetic drugs are easily accessible doesn’t make them any less dangerous. Here are just a few you should be aware of:

**Bath Salts** — Bath salts are a man-made version of cathinone, a stimulant found in the plant khat. Sometimes referred to as Meow Meow, Meph or drone, bath salts are also sometimes labeled as plant food, jewelry cleaner and even phone screen cleaner. Even more disturbing, sellers of these have marketed them with the same clever tactics as corporate candy makers market to children. You may find bath salts packaged in bright packets with names such as Blow, Ivory Wave, Aura, Zeus 2, Zoom, Bliss, Red Dove, White Dove, Vanilla Sky, Blue Silk, White Lightning, Ocean and Charge.

Bath salts became popular in the U.S. in 2010, according to the Dana Foundation. Snorted or swallowed, they provided a psychoactive high. But the side effects can also be lethal. Under the influence of bath salts, users may experience paranoia, seizures, lack of appetite, and in some instances, self-mutilation. They may also cause kidney failure, increased risk of suicide, and even death.

**K2** — K2 falls under the umbrella of a marijuana-like NPS. The synthetic cannabinoids, also frequently called Molly or Krokodil, reacts like marijuana and is typically smoked to produce a psychoactive effect resulting in mood elevation. If taken in too high of a dose, it can have very damaging effects, including hallucinations, vomiting, panic attacks, seizures, confusion and paranoia. Long-term, K2 has been known to cause loss of stamina, short-term memory, motivation and reasoning ability.

Like bath salts, K2 is popular with high school students likely due to its availability at gas stations and corner stores where it's marketed as potpourri. In truth, it's far from that. Instead, K2 is created by spraying chemicals onto leaves that can then be smoked. However, it's not the leaves that cause the high, but the man-made toxins on them.

**Dewshine** — In what is becoming increasingly popular, teens are blending the unthinkable: Mountain Dew and racing fluid. The bizarre combination has already been linked to deaths, namely a January 2016 incident where two teens—16-year-old Logan Stephenson, of Greenbrier, Tennessee and his friend, J.D. Byram—died after drinking the deadly mix.

According to *U.S. News Health*, the blend includes the 100 percent methanol racing fluid with the Pepsi brand soda and is meant to give users a cheap high. But it can result in methanol poisoning diagnosed by severe headache, rapid breathing, nausea and diarrhea, in addition to drowsiness, increased breathing, blindness, coma and, ultimately, death.

**NBOMe** — Of course, there are the more “upscale” synthetic drugs like NBOMe, considered a designer drug. NBOMe is manufactured from the phenethylamine compound and is similar to LSD and Ecstasy. Its street names include 25C, Dime, NBomb and Smiles. Users take in many ways—snorted, placed on or under tongue or in cheeks, smoked and via the eye.

According to the World Health Organization, NBOMe is secretly made in countries such as Germany and Latvia and sold to Americans over the internet. It has been known to cause death in users. It became illegal in America in 2013.

As synthetic drugs become cheaper and more widely available, the risk increases. Until American drug enforcement agencies legalize all of these substances, the danger to young adults will continue to grow. However, understanding the threats, as well disguised as they may be, is an important first step toward protecting those you love.



### **Conflict Of Interest**

I declare that I have no proprietary, financial, professional or other personal interest of any nature or kind in any product, service and/or company that could be construed as influencing the position presented in, or the review of, the manuscript entitled: *“The New High: Synthetic Drugs and Drug Trends”*.

### **About the Author**

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