

# OUT OF YOUR



“Magic mushrooms” may still be considered **more a hallmark of hippie culture than a medical marvel**. But times are a-changin.’ Research suggests that psychedelic drugs may be a **powerful tool for fighting anxiety and depression**. Yet only the future can tell how these ancient drugs will change the medical and **cultural landscape** as we know it.

words\_lizzie kristal. illustrations\_nicole facchina. design\_maria emilia becerra.

**P**sychedelic drugs like LSD and mushrooms are usually associated with 1970s hippies and the rave-goers of today. But these substances are no longer used only for recreational purposes. As research advances, psychedelics are being explored as a possible and effective alternative to mainstream medicine that can help treat depression and anxiety.

Psychedelics come in many forms, like lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), psilocybin (the active ingredient in shrooms), ayahuasca, ibogaine and peyote. Though research is only just picking back up on the subject, Indigenous Americans have been using some types of psychedelics for centuries. According to the National Library of Medicine, peyote is used for ingestion and healing in some Indigenous rituals and is legal under legislation that protects freedom of religion.

Though these substances have been around since ancient times, Mo Costandi, a developmental neurobiologist who covered the subject for *The Guardian*, wrote that modern research dates back to the early to mid-1900s. In the 1950s, a study known as the Saskatchewan trials showed evidence that small doses of psychedelics improved alcoholism. Early research around the same time also found that the substances may help neurosis, schizophrenia, psychopathy and even autism. Before the drugs were criminalized, tens of thousands of patients received prescriptions. While these studies may have been flawed, Costandi said, the encouraging results should have prompted further research.

In 1962, new Federal Drug Administration guidelines cracked down on LSD by labeling it “experimental” and limiting research. A street form emerged around the same time, which quickly became associated with hippies, anti-war protestors and abuse, Costandi explained. In 1968, LSD was outlawed, and it would be decades until research picked up again in the 1990s. Now, with renewed interest, science is closer than ever to finding safe, effective medicine from psychedelics.

Though each type of substance has slightly different effects, they all generally function in similar ways when it comes to the brain. According to Franklin King, director of training and education at the Mass General Center for the Neuroscience of Psychedelics, psychedelics essentially decrease activity in a part of the brain called the default mode network. This, he said, is associated with the sense of self. When psychedelics decrease the activity here, it causes a therapeutic reaction.

“Likely, that’s because a number of psychiatric conditions are involved in an overactive sense of self and overactive ego,” said King.

Michelle Weiner, an interventional pain medicine specialist who works in cannabis and ketamine therapy, further described what she calls our “default mode” in a similar way.

“The ‘default mode’ is a part of the brain that we all default to

when we’re just daydreaming,” she said. “It’s the way that we think about ourselves where we store our personal narrative and who we are.”

When psychedelics are used, they “quiet down that story that limits us and then opens us up to new possibilities,” Weiner said.

The experience of taking psychedelics itself is often considered to be a release from the stress of reality. It gives the brain a break from whatever has been scratching at it by entering a different state of mind. As Weiner described it, “the experience is a very beautiful one.”

One student who asked to remain anonymous described his experience as extremely eye-opening, likely due to a quieting of the default mode: “I felt elevated from society, but humbled by nature,” he said. “I was able to comprehend what everything meant in a very personal way.”

Though psychedelics can be beneficial for mental health, this isn’t your green light to drop LSD at Rolling Loud in the name of “self-care.” These substances should be used in combination with therapy in order to become an effective, long-term treatment.

“Psychedelics are getting a lot of publicity and mainstream ‘take a medication and it cures your depression,’ but they’re forgetting the fact that everybody in these studies is also incorporating therapy into that,” Weiner said.

Therapy for psychedelics doesn’t look like what you might consider a typical session. It goes in phases.

Most commonly, according to the Love Discovery Institute, there are important pre- and post-experience processes to go through.

The pre-experience is based on education and intention setting, in which patients are prompted to understand how psychedelics function and what their own intentions are for using them. Post-experience, on the other hand, is referred to as integration.

“Integration is where the person goes back and focuses on what happened during their experience, and is hopefully able to achieve some meaning and to implement

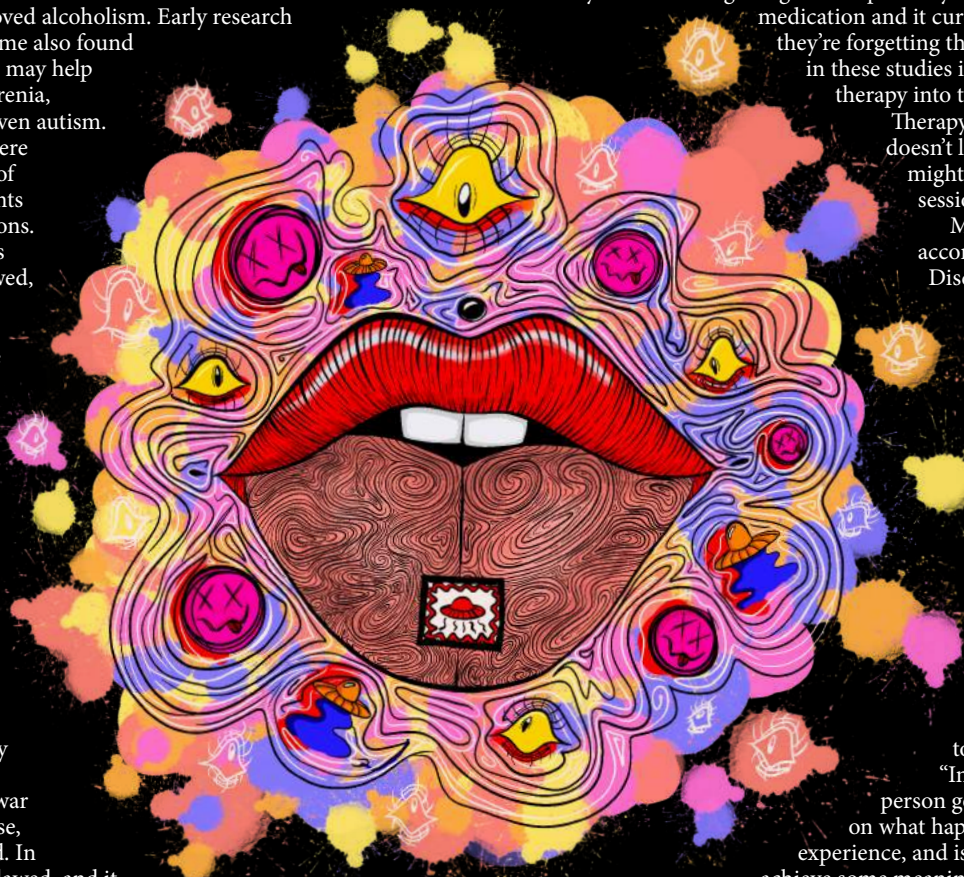
some of those insights into their life,” said King.

The type of therapy is about helping a patient make sense of their experience in whatever ways feel meaningful to them, rather than being led by a therapist.

It’s an integral part of the psychedelic healing process. The idea being that, with strong intentions and effort, the effect of the psychedelics is enhanced.

That being said, there can still be many things that go wrong. Though less likely in a monitored environment, bad trips can occur where a patient has a very negative experience on the drug. Psychedelics are listed as a Schedule I drug by the federal government, meaning they’re highly illegal without research approval and classified as having a high chance of addiction. Caution must be used when considering psychedelics as a possible treatment, but therapy is a way to narrow risks.

“A bad trip feels like a nightmare you can’t wake up from, except it feels more real,” one University of Miami freshman student said about



▼ **THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME:** According to a study by Roland Griffiths, those who took psilocybin argued it was one of the five most significant events in their lives.

her experience. “It had a lasting psychological effect on me, even after it was over.”

Microdosing is another form of psychedelic use that’s gaining popularity, according to an article by Olivia Alexander for *Psychedelics Today*. Instead of taking a whole dosage, microdosing means only taking one-twentieth to one-tenth of a normal dose every day.

This method isn’t used to “escape life,” Alexander writes, but to embrace it. For some, it shows enhanced performance, improved mood, better eating and sleeping habits and less reliance on caffeine. Though possibly beneficial, this method is extremely unresearched and imprecise, meaning it can lead to accidental trips.

Though psychedelics are far from being used as common treatments, considering research is still in its early stages, they could be revolutionary for the world of medicine. According to Weiner, they may eventually be used instead of pharmaceutical drugs for treating common disorders like depression and anxiety.

“It’s [pharmaceuticals/antidepressants] trying to numb you ... the psychedelics are completely different,” Weiner said. “They bring out parts of you that haven’t even been awake or alive so that you feel your feelings in order to heal.”

Much of the current psychedelic use today isn’t necessarily aligned with these medical intentions, but it’s not entirely separate either. According to King, referring to use as “recreational” is inappropriate. It implies irresponsible use, which isn’t always the case.

If you were to study psychedelic users, “there are in varying degrees... elements of the things that are valued in the package of psychedelic assisted therapy,” he said. 🍄

**Want a hint of the feeling? These products use non-psychedelic mushrooms as ingredients for numerous health benefits.**

### Balanced Tiger

These are more than just your average protein bars. Inside each one is a serving of functional mushrooms. They come in two flavors, chocolate chip cookie dough and peanut butter chocolate, and use a different fungi to target different functions. One uses cordyceps to boost energy and the other uses lion’s mane to improve focus. You can buy them on Amazon or their website [balancedtiger.com](http://balancedtiger.com)

### First Person

This brand’s supplements reach a whole new level with mushroom-based pills using cordyceps and lion’s mane. Its a “sunbeam” supplement targets productivity and creativity. “Golden hour” tunes into joy and relaxation. Lastly, “moonlight” helps to achieve deeper and restorative sleep. See [getfirstperson.com](http://getfirstperson.com) for more information.

### Super Mush

Mushrooms have never been so accessible; now, all it takes is a simple mouth spray! Super Mush uses functional mushrooms to create three lines: energy, immunity and chill. Their flavors come in tangerine crush, cinnamon toast and hibiscus dream. Visit [supermush.com](http://supermush.com) for more information.

### Alchemi

This brand produces powder supplements, which can be used in any smoothie, coffee or other recipe of choice. A fan favorite, the Shroom Boost Powder, combines five super mushrooms to transform energy, immunity, longevity and focus. They use cacao, cinnamon and coconut flavors to give it a scrumptious taste. Check out [alchemimushrooms.com](http://alchemimushrooms.com) for more information.

◀ **HALLUCINATING OR PRAYING?** Psychedelics can produce similar brain waves as those who experience religious/spiritual ecstasy, according to the Institute of Noetic Sciences.

