



MAGIC MUSHROOMS

frequently asked questions



background:

What is a mushroom?

Mushrooms are fungi with a network of root-like filaments (called mycelium) growing underground, joined above ground by a stalk to a cap. The cap has a skin on top and gills underneath, from which are released spores ('seeds' for reproduction).

Why are they called 'magic' mushrooms?

Throughout history many cultures have used hallucinogenic plants and fungi, although little is known about their use in Britain. In the Middle Ages, they were made into ointments and rubbed onto a membrane (often the sexual organs) with an available household instrument (i.e. a broomstick). Since flying was a common hallucination, myth and superstition led to the Christian Church wiping out most of the ancient knowledge and burning the 'witches' at the stake. Mind-bending mushrooms came to be seen, like poisonous ones, as 'toadstools'. Even today mushrooms are still portrayed in fairy tales and stories as things associated with pixies, goblins and other evil creatures (Liberty cap are called 'fairy mushrooms' in Ireland).

The hippies rediscovered hallucinogenic mushrooms in the 1960's renaming them 'magic mushrooms' (because they're like magic man!) - or "'shrooms' or 'mushies' for short. They have remained relatively popular ever since (about a quarter-million British people took a 'mushie' trip in 2002) but have thankfully lost much of their pseudo religious hippy mysticism. Having said that, it must be pointed out that some New Age writers and philosophers claim magic mushrooms were brought to Earth by intelligent aliens in order to accelerate human evolutionfetch me a stake and some matches!

What different sorts are there?

As detailed below, each type of mushroom has one or more common names, and an 'official' name based on two Latin words (*in italics*), indicating their general group (*genus*) and specific type (*species*). Due to disagreements among experts, some mushrooms have more than one Latin name.

There are over a hundred different species of hallucinogenic mushroom, some of which have different varieties based on country of origin (e.g. Mexican, Colombian). Many grow wild in Britain, while others are cultivatable indoors. It is not possible to identify them all in this short leaflet, so we will focus on the five types which are most commonly sold and used here. These include two native species; **Liberty cap** and **Fly Agaric** and three foreign mushrooms, namely: **Cubensis**, **Hawaiian**, and **Truffles**. Anyone intending to try other types should get a mushroom identification guide book (or use the internet) and learn to identify them accurately before picking and eating any.

Are they legal?

Yes and no - it depends on the type of mushroom and in some cases, its 'condition'.

Fly Agaric is totally legal. Neither the mushroom nor its main active ingredients - muscimole and ibotenic acid - are covered by the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act (MODA) or any other UK drug laws. With Liberty cap, Cubensis, Hawaiian and Truffles, things get more

complicated. The two main drugs found in these and most other magic mushrooms are psilocin and psilocybin. If they are extracted from the mushrooms or are made synthetically, they become Class A controlled drugs and are illegal to possess or supply. But because psilocin and psilocybin are naturally present in live or fresh mushrooms they are generally legal because they are considered to be “a naturally occurring substance.” In short, it is legal to buy spores and growing kits, to grow and pick these mushrooms, and to eat and sell them if they have just been picked or are still ‘fresh’. But psilocin-containing mushrooms become illegal if “they have ceased to be in their natural state and have been in some way altered by the hand of man.”

In 2002, in response to queries from UK companies, the Home Office confirmed that it was legal to sell “freshly picked mushrooms provided they have not been prepared in any way.” This ‘preparation’ ruling also applies to some other controlled drugs when in natural plant form, such as mescaline (in peyote and san pedro cacti) and cathinone (in the khat shrub), but it does not cover opium poppy, coca leaf, or the cannabis plant.

But when do mushrooms stop being fresh and become prepared?

The clearest examples, as indicated by past court cases, are when they have been intentionally chopped/cut up, crumbled/powdered, cooked or made into drinks or foods (e.g. tea, jam), or ‘frozen and packaged’. But the legal ‘grey area’ concerns when the mushrooms are allowed to dry out naturally, or when their freshness is extended by mechanically chilling or simply freezing them - which are often necessary to prevent them from rotting or going mouldy.

Clearly, the main fault with the current law is that it discourages drying or freezing of magic mushrooms, which increases two **health risks** for users:

Risk One: the amount of fresh ‘shrooms needed for a trip is harder to calculate than the amount of dried ‘shrooms - the variable water content of fresh ‘shrooms results in broad dose ranges which could lead to too many ‘shrooms being eaten.

Risk Two: fresh ‘shrooms are more likely to go mouldy or get diseased (making them toxic).

The UK Medicines Control Agency has also advised companies that they cannot distribute information about the mushrooms they sell because they are not qualified herbalists, but that they can answer direct questions from customers. Most mushroom-selling companies advertise their products as for ‘ornamental’ or ‘research purposes’ only and prohibit sales to under-18s. Some shops also impose maximum sales of 35 grams per customer. The typical price is £5-10 for 10 grams of fresh mushrooms.

Very few people are prosecuted for psilocin offences. Possession and small-scale cultivation is typically dealt with by a police caution or a court fine. Supply and other trafficking offences, though rarely brought, are more likely to receive a prison sentence. ‘Possession with intent to supply’ covers intending to sell or give away psilocin or prepared mushrooms, as well as being in possession of more than is considered consistent with personal use (this amount is not defined). It is also illegal to drive while unfit to do so because of psilocin intoxication.

u s i n g m a g i c m u s h r o o m s :

Growing one of the five types of magic mushroom, or picking the two species which grow wild in Britain (Liberty cap or Fly Agaric), requires specialist knowledge in the form of an old hippie or illustrated guidebook. Whether picking wild ones or buying cultivated ones, one thing reduces risk more than anything else: making sure you have picked or purchased the ‘right ones’. To this end, the appearance and habitat of the five main magic mushrooms is described in their respective sections and two other ‘tests’ for checking their identity are presented in the **REDUCING RISKS** section. The other main areas of advice concern preserving, storing, preparing and consuming them.

How are they preserved and stored?

Magic mushrooms stay fresh for 5-10 days, particularly if they have a low water content (as *Cubensis* and Truffles do) and especially if kept chilled in the fridge. After this, to prevent rotting, they have to be dried, frozen or otherwise preserved. They will last several months to a year if frozen (in a sealed bag in a freezer), but totally drying the mushrooms allows them to last indefinitely.

Drying reduces the potency (drug content) of psilocin-based mushrooms only slightly, while actually making Fly Agaric 'shrooms stronger (and less toxic). They can be dried naturally by leaving them on paper at room temperature for several days, though, to reduce the risk of rotting, some people accelerate drying by placing them next to a radiator, or in an open-doored oven (350F) for up to half an hour. Cooking them in a closed-door oven requires a maximum temperature of 95F (36C) for psilocin-based mushrooms and 200F for Fly Agaric (see sections on each mushroom for details). They are totally dried when they turn to powder when crushed. It's then best to crumble them and mix up the powder to even out the strength. When kept for later use, the 'strength' of 'shrooms gradually reduces with time, though storing them in a cool, dark, dry air-tight glass container extends their shelf life.

How are they prepared and consumed?

Most magic mushrooms can be swallowed raw (fresh or dried), or mixed into food/drink - the exception is Fly Agaric, which is better eaten cooked or at least dried (see: Fly Agaric). Fresh 'shrooms are soft and damp to the touch and before swallowing them they should be rinsed quickly in cold water and smelled/examined to make sure they are not stale or maggoty. Eating them mixed or cooked into food (especially spicy dishes) is inadvisable because of possible nausea and vomiting.

A more palatable method is to brew 'mushroom tea', by powdering and boiling in hot water for at least 10 minutes and drinking the liquid (herbal teas can be added to make it taste better, though sugar and vitamin C should not be added). If swallowed dry, it is best to chop up larger 'shrooms into smaller pieces (they generally don't taste

good enough to chew) and to remove any straw-like stalks (to prevent them sticking in your throat), before washing them down with water. Some users prefer to crumble the dried 'shrooms, and swallow the powder in capsules or paper wraps.

Though they cannot be sniffed or injected, some people smoke dried mushrooms (particularly Fly Agaric), although opinions vary on whether this 'works'. But few people now use the two most traditional methods of taking mushies, namely: making them into ointments, and applying them to membranes (like the genitals or anus) or drinking the urine of someone who has eaten *Amanita muscaria* (see: Fly Agaric).

How many mushrooms do you need for a trip?

The following chart gives an indication of the dose needed for a medium and strong trip, which will be affected not only by the strength of the mushroom, but by your previous experience and tolerance. Regular users will experience tolerance (needing more of the drug to get the same effect) - in fact, tolerance to mushrooms is so rapid, that after about a week of daily use, the dose needed to get high would become unswallowable and possibly poisonous.

Because of wide variations in both the size and water content (fresh mushrooms are between 5% and 90% water), it is difficult to estimate the number of mushrooms needed for a trip. The dried weight of mushrooms is a much better guide to a desired dose. However, because the law forces retailers to sell only freshly picked magic mushrooms, estimates of the weight of fresh mushrooms needed are also given. The potency (or strength) also varies depending on both the country the mushroom comes from and if they are wild or cultivated (indoor growing techniques can greatly increase potency).

What drugs are mixed with magic mushrooms?

Mixing other drugs with magic mushrooms is generally not advisable, though many users recommend smoking cannabis as the effects are coming on, because cannabis is an anti-emetic - it reduces nausea and vomiting, the main unpleasant side effects of

mushies. Some users also take a half to full dose of ecstasy just before they neck their 'shrooms, in order to produce a happy, 'centred' trip, and to reduce the risk of a bad trip. By contrast, some people sniff cocaine or speed, or take other trippy drugs like LSD or harmaline when on mushies - often to get more intense experiences, or just to get more energy (mushies can sometimes be 'mongy' on their own).

Lastly, as well as using other drugs to intensify or modify the main effects, some mushroom users use depressant drugs to assist the 'come down' into ordinary consciousness afterwards - such as alcohol or tranquillisers - though this is not advisable.

GRAM WEIGHT & TYPE OF MAGIC MUSHROOM NEEDED FOR A TRIP

	Dried Weight (grams) & Trip Strength		Fresh Weight (grams) & Trip Strength	
	medium	strong	medium	strong
Liberty cap	(1.0-3.0)	(3.5-7.0)	(2.0-18)	(7.0-42)
Cubensis	(1.0-3.0)	(2.0-7.0)	(2.0-12)	(4.0-28)
Hawaiian	(0.5-1.0)	(1.0-2.0)	(1.0-4.0)	(2.0-8.0)
Truffles	(1.0-2.5)	(3.0-6.0)	(2.0-8.0)	(6.0-18)
Fly agaric	(5.0-10)	(10-20)	not eaten fresh	

Dried mushrooms = totally dry (no water)

Fresh mushrooms = between 1% to 90% water

Medium/Strong = grams of mushroom need for a medium and strong trip (light trips or test doses involve lower doses than those for a medium trip). The number of mushrooms needed is NOT covered since variations in size make it an unreliable measurement of dosage. The suggested doses are best estimates for average "shrooms, but the final decision is your own.

N.B Once magic mushrooms are dried and prepared for use, they become Class A drugs and are illegal.

the effects:

What happens in your body when you eat magic mushrooms?

When magic mushrooms are swallowed, they are digested in the stomach and intestines, and the active ingredients may be partly modified in the liver (e.g. psilocybin is converted into psilocin) before being passed to the heart-lung-heart loop to be pumped up to the brain. In the brain, psilocin works in a similar way to LSD by boosting a particular type of serotonin (5HT-2A) - a neuromodulator involved in controlling other neurotransmitters, and affecting such mental functions as mood, perception, memory, awareness and appetite. By contrast, muscimole, the main drug in Fly Agaric, works on the muscarine receptors of brain cells, affecting levels of acetylcholine, GABA and glutamate - neurotransmitters involved in movement, memory, learning and emotion. This is why Liberty cap and Fly Agaric produce different types of trip.

What does a magic mushroom trip feel like?

Your mood, previous experience and personality, along with where it takes place have a major influence over what kind of trip you have. Dose is also critical, with full-blown hallucinations usually requiring higher doses. One magic mushroom trip differs from another as much as the effects of one drug differs from another. On the same trip, you can feel like you are sharing your friend's experience one moment, and then be in a world of your own moments later. The main thing to remember is that tripping is an active experience, not a passive one. In short, it's not like going to the cinema, paying for your ticket, and watching a specified movie. A useful metaphor to help you understand this point is to view tripping as like getting on a horse and going into a strange landscape. You can let the horse take you where it wants, hauling you up hills and back down into valleys, galloping for miles and then stopping and grazing - or even running round and round in circles. Alternatively, you can grab hold of the reins, and direct the horse into those parts of the landscape that interest you most - riding at your own speed,

and in your own style. The more disciplined your mind is, and the more you prepare for the trip, the more likely it will be that you can control your trip - rather than it controlling you.

The particular experiences of tripping on the four psilocin-based mushrooms and Fly Agaric are each described below. But what they have in common, and what distinguishes them from LSD and synthetic hallucinogens, is that the trips they produce are more likely to involve warm, loving feelings; dreamy and trance-like states of mind; mystical and magical experiences; and natural, organic 'visuals' - such as animal faces, plant images and mythical creatures.

What is a bad trip?

Some bad trips are caused by scary hallucinations (e.g. seeing 'monsters'), while others are based on an outpouring of 'repressed emotion' (bad feelings squashed to the back of your mind because you could not deal with them). But perhaps the main trigger of bad trips is 'ego loss' - changes in your sense of personal identity. This can be an unexpected experience ("I thought I was just going to see things"), which some people find terrifying. But bad trips are fairly rare on magic mushrooms and are generally limited to such scenarios as: feeling moody/upset or worrying about the effects before tripping; being in an unusual setting or having a bad experience (e.g. accident) while tripping; and taking a first trip or being 'spiked'. Most people getting a bad trip can 'muddle through' to the end without too much trouble. But what causes a bad trip to spiral out of control into a full-blown psychotic episode is panicking. Allowing yourself to become panicky when tripping is like trying to escape from a Chinese finger puzzle by pulling - the more you pull the tighter it gets (see: *How do you deal with bad trips?*).

Is there a comedown or any after-effects?

Compared with the nasty come-downs people get from drugs like crack, speed and alcohol, there is no real come-down from magic mushrooms. The day after tripping, people sometimes feel a little fatigued or confused, but major physical symptoms or mental

problems are highly unlikely. Flashbacks - experiences of reliving the trip days to months afterwards - are also rare and when they do occur, tend to be brief, one-offs and fairly easily handled. Psychoses related to magic mushroom use are even rarer. The symptoms are similar to paranoid schizophrenia and are usually found in people with a family history of mental disorder - except that drug-related psychoses usually clear up after a few weeks, as long as the person stops taking the drugs. In fact, the main after-effect of tripping on mushrooms, particularly fly Agaric, is amnesia - memory for such strange experiences rapidly fades.

main types of mushrooms:

LIBERTY CAP

(*Psilocybe semilanceata*)

aka Fairy Mushrooms in Ireland.



What do they look like?

Since the revival of interest in the 1960's, Liberty cap has been the most popular magic mushroom in Britain, though Cubensis has recently become a keen competitor. It is shaped like an upward-facing breast/umbrella, tapering to a distinctive nipple on the top. The size of fresh caps varies from 0.5 cm to 2 cm, while the spindly stem is 2-6 cm high. The cap and stem are a rusty brown/tan colour when fresh, turning to a paler brown/yellow when dry; while the gills and spores are chocolate-brown to purple.

Where do they come from?

Psilocybe mushrooms grow wild all over the world and Liberty cap is the main species native to Britain. Their natural habitat is uncultivated or well-manured fields, pastures and woods and they prefer to grow on animal dung, peat, moss and rotting wood. In urban areas, it can be found in graveyards, parks, greens and garden lawns. It can also be cultivated indoors. The mushrooms grow in groups, sometimes partly hidden within clumps of long grass, from September to the first November frosts.

What is in Liberty cap?

The main active ingredients in Liberty cap (and in Cubensis, Hawaiian and truffles), are psilocin and psilocybin. The combined amount of psilocin and psilocybin in Liberty cap varies between varieties and batches. Psilocybin is changed into psilocin by the liver - psilocin is about one and a half times stronger than psilocybin - so what 'hits' the brain and causes the effects is all psilocin. One of the closest chemical relatives of psilocin is bufotenine (MDMT), which is found in toad skin-slime, Central/South American tree bark/vines (used in voodoo potions), and in Fly Agaric. Other chemical cousins include LSD and DMT. Per milligram of drug, psilocin is eight times more potent than DMT, but about 100 times less potent than LSD.

How much do you need to take?

About one to three grams of dried 'shrooms for moderate psychedelic effects, through to about 4 to 7 grams for a full-blown trip. Taking less than one gram of dried 'shrooms produces a light trip. Depending on freshness and drying method, the equivalent dose of fresh psilocybe mushrooms could be 2 to 6 times greater; between 2 and 20 grams for a moderate trip, and between 8 and 40 grams for a strong trip.

What are the effects of psilocin?

Depending on dose and other things, a psilocin trip lasts between 3 and 8 hours, averaging 4-5 hours. Some users report subtle differences between the trips produced by the four main types of

psilocin-based mushroom, though they share the same general effects, including three main stages (onset, main and residual).

The onset of the trip begins with physical effects (caused by adrenaline being pumped into your body), which are similar to, but less intense than, the effects of speed - including dilated pupils, a numb face, dry mouth, faster pulse and muscular tension. Appetite is generally reduced or eliminated, and nausea is very common, sometimes leading to vomiting. Although these physical effects continue throughout the trip, they become less noticeable as the main mental effects kick in. Trips also often start with a release of emotional tension - leading to mumbly conversations (confessing, regretting, laughing, crying, etc).

The main stage of the trip usually involves two experiences: episodes of altered moods and awareness; and visual distortions and pseudo-hallucinations (those you know are not real) - including: intensification of colour; moving objects leaving 'trails'; object replications (one cat becoming several cats); objects/ scenes seeming 'jumbled up' (rooms with doors on the ceiling); and psychedelic patterns. Other people may look very different from normal and appear beautiful, comical or terrifying. You may also see music and hear pictures (known as 'synaesthesia', which has to be experienced for it to make sense).

Later on your mood may swing between energetic and 'mongy'; calm and anxious; amazed and withdrawn; serious and hilarious. The mind can become highly focused on one thing, or overwhelmed by an explosion of ideas, as altered states of consciousness take hold - for instance: out-of-body feelings (astral projection), time distortions (slowing/stopping) and mystical experiences and revelations (contact with nature/God/'machine elves'). On larger doses, ego loss may occur. This is our sense of personal identity changing or dissolving, we might ask: "who/what the fuck am I?"

In the final residual stage of the trip, there is a gradual return to a normal state of consciousness, often in 'waves', with feelings that the trip is ending being suddenly overtaken by a rush of psychedelia. Users are often thoughtful and a little quiet during this phase, reflecting on the experience; while some report fatigue and headaches.

User account of a Liberty cap trip

(25 year old woman)

"One lazy Sunday morning, me and my two friends decided to finish off some mushies I had left. The first thing I noticed about an hour after swallowing 30 'caps' was that things looked brighter and sharper - but a sickly feeling was also growing in my belly. Just at the point I thought I was going to vomit, it began to subside... I was starting to feel different on the inside too - and my two friends were giggling and mumbling, but not to each other. The curtains, though still, looked like they were fluttering in a draft and my room seemed to be changing into a cave-like hole with hidden things in the shadows... My mouth had dried out, so I went to stand up to get a drink - but nothing happened. I looked at my legs and could not decide whether they were crossed or uncrossed. I asked my nearest friend 'are my legs crossed?' and she stared at them, for how long I could not tell, before saying 'non-crossed'. Then it dawned on me that I could not remember what I normally did when I wanted to stand up - so I said 'Just remind me how you stand up', but both of my friends simply fell about in fits of laughter... Later we went for a lark about in the woods to burn off some of the nervous energy and we all thought the trees looked totally like two-dimensional cardboard cut-outs...Then, I began feeling that I wasn't the same person any more and kept thinking that I might have swapped minds or bodies with someone.... Eventually, the trip started to wear off, we went home and I took a shower. I was drying myself, and looking into the mirror, when I noticed my face was slowly changing into an ape-face. I felt shocked but then remembered that I was still tripping - but had somehow forgotten all about it for a moment..."

CUBENSIS

(*Stropharia Cubensis* or
Psilocybe Cubensis)

aka cubies, gold-tops, San Isidro



What do they look like?

Its cap is ball-shaped, and coloured tan-orange to red, while its gills are whitish to purple-brown, its spores are chocolate-brown to purple, and the stem is white to bluish. The cap grows to 1.5 to 5 cm in diameter, while the stalk is up to 7 cm high, and is often thickened at the base. The Colombian variety is slightly larger, while Thai ‘shrooms have thicker stems and green-hued caps.

Where do they come from?

Cubensis is native to Central/South America and Southeast Asia, where it grows in fields and woods on dung, soil, and rotting leaves and wood. It has rapidly become one of the most commonly

cultivated and sold magic mushrooms in Britain - mainly because it is relatively easy to grow (in growing tanks called terrariums), and because its low water content allows it to stay fresh for up to 10 days after picking. It has three main varieties - Mexican, Colombian and Thai - plus others (e.g. Amazonian, Equatorian, Indian).

What's in Cubensis and how much do you need to take?

Like Liberty cap, Cubensis contains psilocin and psilocybin, but has a somewhat higher potency. Potency is highest in younger, ball-shaped mushrooms (as they age, they become shaped like an umbrella, then an inverted umbrella). Potency is also highest in the Thai variety and lowest in the Mexican variety, with the Colombian and Amazonian varieties occupying a middle ranking. So, the dose of dried mushrooms required for a trip on Mexican Cubensis is similar to that needed for Liberty cap (1-3 grams for a moderate trip, 4-7 grams for a strong trip); while doses of half this amount are advisable for a trip on Thai Cubensis (0.5-1.5 grams for a moderate trip and 2-3.5 grams for a strong trip) - with doses of Colombian and Amazonian Cubensis being somewhere in-between. But because Cubensis has a lower water content than Liberty cap, doses of fresh Cubensis should be no more than two to four times higher than the equivalent dose of dry Cubensis. For instance, a strong trip would require between 4 and 14 grams of fresh Thai 'shrooms; or between 8 and 28 grams for fresh Mexican 'shrooms (mail-order companies recommend at least 20 grams).

What are the effects of Cubensis?

The general effects of psilocin are described in the section on Liberty cap, though users say that the distinctive features of a Cubensis trip are intense, colourful 'visuals'.

Thai has the strongest, trippiest effects, while Mexican is described as more giggly and sociable.

HAWAIIAN

(*Copelandia cyanescens* or
Panaeolus cyanescens)

aka 'blue meanies'



What do they look like?

The Hawaiian has a light brown to pallid grey ball-shaped cap, mottled gills and black spores, and a whitish, flecked, thick stem. The cap is about 1.5 - 3.5 cm wide, and the stem is about 1cm high.

Where do they come from?

They are native to tropical states in the USA (Hawaii, Florida), South America and south-east Asia, where they prefer to grow on manure heaps (but not horse dung). They are also cultivated and sold in the UK.

What's in Hawaiian mushrooms and how much do you need to take?

Hawaiian mushroom also contains psilocin and psilocybin, and is usually the strongest type on sale. They are usually about five to ten times as strong as liberty cap. The recommended dose of dried 'shrooms is about 1 to 2 grams for a strong trip, and around half a gram to a gram for a moderate trip - while a quarter gram or less produces a light trip.

Doses of fresh Hawaiian 'shrooms can be two to four times greater, depending on how recently they were picked - meaning that the maximum dose for fresh Hawaiian is 8 grams.

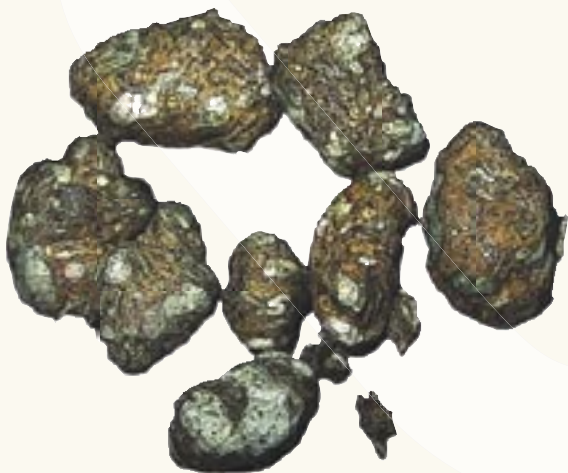
What are the effects of Hawaiian?

The general effects of psilocin are described in the section on Liberty cap, though users say that Hawaiian mushrooms produce the most intense trip of all.

TRUFFLES

(*Psilocybe tamapnensis* and *Psilocybe mexicana*)

aka Philosopher's Stone



What do they look like?

A truffle is a kind of subterranean mushroom - a fungal growth from the root-like mycelium, which feeds off plant roots. Because they cannot be seen from above ground, pigs and dogs are trained to sniff them out. Psilocybe truffles look like shapeless lumps of brown congealed muesli, and taste nutty but bitter. They should not be confused with the other kind of truffle, which looks vaguely similar but is actually a crunchy chocolate ball with no hallucinogenic effects.

Where do they come from?

Truffles grow underground in central and south America countries, but are also cultivated indoors in the UK - their low water content (nearer 50-65% than the usual 80-90%) helps them stay fresh for longer, making them popular with retailers.

What's in Truffles and how much do you need to take?

Since they taste OK, truffles are easier to chew up before swallowing. They have a potency similar to liberty cap. A strong trip would require between about 3 and 6 grams (dried) and a moderate trip about 1 to 2.5 grams. But when truffles are fresh, they are only about half to two-thirds water by weight, so the dose taken only needs to be double/treble that for dried truffles.

What are the effects of Truffles?

The general effects of psilocin are covered in the section on Liberty cap, though users say that truffle trips are more physical, euphoric and 'visual'.

FLY AGARIC
(*Amanita muscaria*)



What do they look like?

Fly Agaric is the red/amber-capped, white-flecked magic mushroom of fairy tales books. It has a yellow/orange to red cap, which is ball to disc-shaped, with white to yellow spots (warts) on top, white to cream gills underneath, and a stout white stalk with scales and a bulbous base. The cap can grow to very different sizes (from 7 to 20 cm in diameter), and the stalk can be 5-20 cm tall.

Where do they come from?

Like Liberty cap, Fly Agaric is native to the UK, and grows wild in overgrown pastures and woods (especially birch, larch or pine), but is very difficult to cultivate indoors. It has been used to get high all over the world for over 2,000 years. For instance, Fly Agaric was probably 'soma', the legendary drug of ancient times, and also underlies the Father Christmas myth of Lapland - his red costume represents the mushroom and the flying reindeers are linked to the fact that Lap reindeers grazed on Fly Agaric and hallucinations about flying were common. Historians have also suggested that the extremely violent ('berserk') behaviour of the Vikings when they went out 'pillaging and plundering', was partly induced by pre-battle munching of Fly Agaric. Red squirrels also eat Fly Agaric, though they have not yet shown any signs of going berserk - though it is probably best not to provoke them, just in case.

What's in them?

The main active ingredients of the Fly Agaric mushroom are muscimole and ibotenic acid - though muscimole is hardly present in the live/fresh mushroom. The drying process turns the ibotenic acid into muscimole - which is five times more potent and far less toxic.

Fly Agaric's active ingredients are called 'isoxazoles'. They are among the only natural deliriant drugs, along with 'tropane' drugs found in plants used in witchcraft and herbalism, including: belladonna/deadly nightshade and datura/thorn-apple (atropine and scopolamine in both); and mandrake (mandragorine, hyoscyamine, and scopolamine) and henbane (tropine and scopine). Synthetic delirants include anaesthetics (e.g. ketamine) and solvents (e.g. butane).

How are they taken?

Fly Agaric are taken in the same ways as the other mushrooms, except that they are more toxic if eaten fresh. So, it is best to hang it up to dry naturally, or else to cook it - either by boiling in salt water or preferably by oven-drying it at a temperature of 170-200F. The mushrooms sweat out their juice, so should be basted every 10 minutes - they are ready when the juice disappears and they crumble when touched. As well as destroying toxins and bugs, drying/cooking turns the ibotenic acid into muscimole (making the effects stronger). Many people recommend eating only the cap's skin and the thin yellowish layer under the skin.

The unique feature of Fly Agaric is that the same dose can be taken more than once! Its main active ingredient, muscimole, is the only known mind-bending drug which passes through the body into the urine totally unaltered - so, if you can stand the taste of piss, it can be used three or four times before it gets too weak (the Laps have been doing it for centuries!). It is in fact healthier to drink the urine of Fly Agaric eaters than to eat Fly Agaric itself, because the body of the first user filters out the more poisonous chemicals in the mushroom. If you do decide to drink the urine of a Fly Agaric eater, there is no need to boil it because urine is sterile, but to prevent vomiting you may need to swallow it in one gulp or else disguise the taste by mixing it with other drinks, unless of course you are a piss drinking connoisseur, in which case - ENJOY!

How much do you need to take?

Because Fly Agaric is more toxic than psilocin-containing mushrooms, the safest dose to start with is 1 to 5 grams of dried material, which is a light trip. A standard trip requires 5 to 10 grams, while a strong trip requires up to 20 grams.

When the active ingredients are extracted or synthesised, the amounts needed for standard effects are 10 to 15 mg of muscimole or 50 to 100 mg of ibotenic acid. Redder-capped 'shrooms are believed to be more trippy than yellow-capped ones, as are smaller ones, those with many warts, those growing earlier in the season, and the Siberian variety.

What are the effects of the Fly Agaric?

The duration of the trip is unpredictable, lasting anything between 4 and 10 hours. It begins with physical effects, which include: slower heart rate, lower blood pressure, higher temperature, slower breathing, loss of appetite, nausea and stomach cramps.

The pupils (black bits of eyes) become bigger, along with a runny nose, salivation, sweating, twitching and trembling, muscle numbness (especially in the feet) and loss of balance. Emotional reactions are also common during the initial stage of the trip (regret, anxiety, etc.).

These effects subside after an hour as the main stage kicks in, starting off with a sedative, sleepy phase, which merges into a more energetic, hallucinatory phase (about 2-3 hours long). In the sleepy, trance-like phase, users often lie down and shut their eyes, leading to highly detailed fantasies/delusions (e.g. about flying, strange worlds) with vivid closed-eye imagery similar to the lucid dreams people have just before waking up. In the energetic phase the person usually sits up with open eyes. True and total hallucinations may occur (believing the hallucination to be real, and seeing things that are not really there). These can include hearing strange voices; visual distortions of size and shape, feelings of floating and flying, taste and smell hallucinations, and even 'synaesthesia' (hearing colours etc.). Emotional experiences vary but usually include hilarity and excitement - though fear is often 'blocked', making bad trips rare.

Any strange behaviour or energetic activities are also likely to occur during this phase, partly in response to true hallucinations or delusions. For instance, the red-faced rages and frenzy reported in users of Fly Agaric in ancient times (e.g. the 'berserk' rampages of the Vikings) are thought to have arisen during this phase. The capacity for rational action and thought and knowing what is real is also impaired. Thinking is more magical than logical, memory is disturbed and the user is self-absorbed and easily distracted. Perceptions of body and personal identity can be distorted. Lastly, there is a long tail off of effects over a 1-5 hour period, with hallucinations and fantasies coming and going erratically, and fatigue and hunger gradually rising.

User description of Fly Agaric trip

(22 year old man)

“While camping in Wales for a weekend with friends, we all decided to eat some Fly Agaric mushrooms on the first evening. They had already been oven-dried, and I swallowed about three caps in small chunks washed down with water. Sitting round the campfire a few hours later, the first thing I noticed was feeling tense and sick and I soon puked, but just some water. Then my face started to go numb, my eyes went watery, and I started drooling and trembling all over...

My body began to feel heavy, and I got sleepy. I went into the most bizarre dream while half-awake - I was vividly imagining I was in a huge gothic city, with thousands of levels and tunnels like a termite hill and the buildings were fantastic pieces of intricate sculpture bathed in neon lights of all colours. It was like being in some epic Hollywood movie, except that there were hundreds of characters and the story-line was all over the place, just like real life... then, I ‘came round’ and found myself staring at my friend’s music-machine; I heard my friends talking excitedly to each other, but they looked like total strangers in the firelight, and they seemed small, as if a long way away.

I felt more buzzy now and stood up to stretch my legs, but felt like I was floating away, and sat down quickly as a wave of nausea hit me. Every so often, the wind blowing in the trees sounded like someone whispering my name, and brought an exotic smell in the air ... whenever

I stared into the fire for long, I started seeing the most amazing images of mythical creatures, like wizards, goblins and dragons - some looked as if they were talking right to me, but I couldn't hear any words...

The darkness beyond the fire felt and looked like huge mossy, stone walls all around us, and I kept thinking that I was in an ancient castle...

After a few hours, I started to come back to normal a bit, but the hallucinations continued on and off for hours, until I eventually fell asleep".

the dangers:

Are magic mushrooms harmful to health?

Magic mushrooms are not physically addictive, meaning that regular users do not experience a withdrawal syndrome when they stop using (as alcoholics and heroin addicts do). Similarly, they rarely lead to psychological dependence or psychosis - though anyone with a history of mental illness should avoid using mushrooms. There is no evidence that occasional or moderate use of magic mushrooms causes damage to the brain, liver or any other body organs. But eating far too many (overdosing), or picking and eating poisonous 'shrooms by mistake, can each seriously damage the liver and kidneys and could prove fatal.

Can magic mushrooms kill you?

As every tabloid newspaper reader knows, users of hallucinogenic drugs are forever running around looking for a high-rise building to throw themselves from (taking care to avoid those flying pigs as they plummet to the ground). In reality, accidental or intentional deaths while tripping occur about once a decade - usually classified as 'bodily trauma' from falling, car crash, etc... Even so, when tripping it is wise to avoid risky activities like driving, swimming and climbing, and to stick to safer things like staring at a lava lamp or mirror - in short, exploring inner space rather than the outer world.

So the main risks of death from magic mushrooms arise from eating far too many, or eating poisonous ones by mistake (see next question). But the average person would have to consume the equivalent of 400 mg of psilocin in one dose to experience toxic poisoning, with a lethal dose requiring over 20 grams. Based on the average potency of dried mushrooms, this would mean trying to eat over three kilograms of Liberty cap, truffles or Mexican Cubensis; over one and a half kilograms of Thai Cubensis; or over a kilogram of Hawaiian mushrooms.

Some experts claim that amounts of dry Fly Agaric not much larger than the effective dose, can poison or kill. But others claim that it is as harmless as Liberty cap - which seems more likely,

since there are actually no first-hand accounts of fatal poisoning. The number of deaths attributed to poisoning by psilocin-containing mushrooms between 1980 and 1995 was two, though it is not known whether other drugs were also involved.

reducing the risks:

How do you avoid picking and eating poisonous mushrooms?

Various types of poisonous mushroom resemble the trippy type, and many grow in the same places, so one of the biggest risks is mistakenly picking and eating these instead. For instance, there are 60 species of *Amanita* - these include *Amanita pantherina* (panther caps), *Amanita virosa* (destroying angel) and *Amanita phalloides* (death cap). Though many have hallucinogenic effects, with the exception of Fly Agaric, *Amanita* mushrooms are very poisonous - they seriously damage the liver and kidneys, killing most people who eat them, with survivors often requiring liver transplants. They also cause 90% of accidental poisoning deaths in the UK. But these deaths involve people who pick wild mushrooms for food or other purposes - there are no confirmed cases of fatal mushroom poisoning in the UK being attributable to drug users picking poisonous 'shrooms by mistake, instead of the 'magic' kind.

Similarly, several species of *Inocybe*, *Conocybe* and *Galerina* mushroom resemble *Psilocybe* mushrooms, but are poisonous - accounting for many cases of mushroom poisoning in the USA.

Specialist mushroom picking books, the internet, and/or old hippies are the best starting point for the budding mushroom picker. In order to reduce the risk of picking or eating the wrong mushroom, you should make at least three independent checks on them. When running these checks, make sure that you choose two or more fresh, mature (fully grown) healthy specimens for **testing**.

What are the tests?

Test One: using illustrated guidebooks, identify them by visual checks of the stem (stalk) and cap (skin and gills) - including shape, size, and colour. Also, smell and taste them so you get better at identifying them this way too.

Test Two: the damage test involves tearing/breaking a fresh mushroom - particularly the stalk - and checking 30 minutes later to see what colour it has turned. Psilocin-containing mushrooms turn blue at the tear, and the more potent they are; the bluer the damaged area is - which is why Hawaiian 'shrooms turn intense blue at the damage site. But there are also some poisonous species, which turn blue when damaged - which is why you need more than one test.

Test Three: each species of magic mushroom has different coloured spores, so they can also be identified by their spore-print. This test involves putting a fresh mushroom cap, gill-side down, on a piece of white paper (coloured paper if the spores are white), and placing a jar over the top (small mushrooms should have a drop of water placed on their cap to prevent drying out). Leave alone for at least half an hour, though the spore print may take up to eight hours to appear; then check to see what colour the spore-print is. For instance, Liberty cap and Cubensis generally have chocolate brown to purple spores, Hawaiian has black spores, and Fly Agaric has white spores. Rust-coloured spores indicate poisonous *Inocybe* mushrooms, which can resemble *Psilocybe* species.

The best time to pick Liberty cap or Fly Agaric mushrooms is during a dry/sunny day after several days rain between September and November. As well as checking you have picked the right ones, you should follow these **rules** too.

What are the rules?

Rule One: to pick 'shrooms, twist the stem just above the ground until it breaks (don't just pull/rip, and don't cut).

Rule Two: always check freshly picked 'shrooms for signs of maggots, disease or mould, discarding any which look unhealthy straight away (much harder to do when they are dried, and prevents

contamination of other picked 'shrooms).

Rule Three: avoid carrying your picked mushies in a plastic bag or metal container, because this can make them sweaty and gooey - a paper bag or cardboard box is ideal, though a basket can help spread the spores as you move around).

Rule Four: avoid trespassing on private land, and remember the country code in rural areas, especially: not taking dogs with you, not dropping litter, shutting gates, and steering clear of crops and farm creatures - especially bulls (the ones with horns and big balls) and farmers (the ones with flat-caps and big balls). It's best not to respond to warnings of "ged orf moi laaarnd" with retorts like "piss off sheep-shagger", particularly when the farmer has a large shotgun or dog by his side.

How do you identify and help someone with mushroom poisoning?

The general signs and symptoms of mushroom poisoning include: watery eyes and mouth, a yellow pallor (jaundice), regular/violent vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhoea, breathing difficulties, and agitation/confusion. In the worst cases, there will be fits, convulsions and/or unconsciousness - if death occurs, it is usually caused by heart failure. The signs of poisoning may show up within half an hour or as late as 40 hours after swallowing mushrooms, and some people appear to recover only to get ill again later.

Helping someone with mushroom poisoning always means taking them to hospital, even if they seem to be recovering. The later the symptoms show up, the more urgently the person should be taken to hospital.

In hospital, in addition to pumping the person's stomach, doctors can administer antidotes to the specific poison (e.g. atropine for Fly Agaric poisoning) and provide symptom-specific medication (e.g. to control vomiting).

How do you deal with a bad trip?

Taking magic mushrooms on your own is not advisable as it means that there are no friends to help you if you have a bad trip. When tripping with friends, it is best if at least one remains straight (known as a 'ground control' or 'guide') - just to help confirm what is real and unreal, especially in an emergency (e.g. "is that blood on my hands or ketchup?").

If you come across a stranger having a bad trip (e.g. in a club or festival), it is best to locate their friends - strangers can seem scary on a bad trip and spending the night trying to calm down someone you've just met is not most people's idea of fun. If someone you know is having a bad trip, you can help them by carrying out one or more of the five steps from the **Bad-trip Rescue Procedure**:

What is the bad trip rescue procedure?

Step One: take them to a quiet place with no distractions (like mobiles or TV/music) where they feel safe and can't accidentally harm themselves; and, to distract them from any bizarre thoughts, talk calmly to them about pleasant or ordinary things - and regularly reminding them that they are experiencing the effects of a drug, which will eventually wear off.

Step Two: if the bad trip continues, let them act freely but watch them to make sure they don't do anything risky or harmful - if they do (e.g. sitting on a window-ledge) try to persuade them to stop rather than trying to stop them - physical restraint should never be used unless they are about to do something very dangerous (and you feel brave). If they show strange but harmless behaviour - such as hiding under a table - go along with it, as long it makes them feel better. Avoid doing anything that makes them more paranoid than they already might be (e.g. staring at them, whispering to others).

Step Three: if they remain upset but 'handleable', repeat steps 1 & 2 - but do not give them any food, drink or other drugs - except that it's OK to let them sip water or to let smokers have a cigarette (though watch they don't set fire to anything). Basically, a minor tranquilliser such as diazepam (i.e. a single 5 mg Valium tablet) is enough to bring most people out of a bad trip, though medicating a

bad tripper should be left to doctors. Many users swear that sugary food and vitamin C help to bring down a bad tripper.

Step Four: if they become more and more panicky, ask them to do any relaxation exercises they (or you) know, especially controlling their breathing. If they hyperventilate, breathing in and out of a paper bag can help - it's important that you let them do this themselves, but advise them to stop when normal breathing returns.

Step Five: if, despite all these efforts they get worse, take them to a hospital - particularly if they start acting dangerously, or are still acting disturbed after the trip should have ended. They may be given sedation, and released when they are feeling better (if you are over 18 years old, it is very unlikely that the police will be contacted by the hospital). But you should remember that having strange doctors probe you with questions and instruments during a bad trip might make the whole thing worse.

Usually, none of this is necessary, and a bad tripper will calm down and recover within an hour or two - and be extremely embarrassed about the trouble they caused. It is also useful to discuss bad trips soon afterwards with friends, because memories of such weird experiences tend to fade quickly.

safer tripping:

Be aware of the law

Possessing and supplying 'prepared' magic mushrooms is illegal. As soon as magic mushrooms are 'prepared', they become Class A drugs.

Store mushrooms safely

Store them away from children. A dry, dark, cool, airtight container prevents loss of potency - as does drying and freezing.

Find out as much as you can about tripping

Make sure that it's an experience you want.

Prepare yourself before a trip

Don't trip if you have worries or are in a bad mood, as tripping can make this worse.

Plan your trip

Have it in a safe place at a suitable time.

Avoid tripping alone

Choose the 'right' people to trip with. Don't trip with strangers and never trip with children around.

Never 'spike' anyone with mushrooms

It's dangerous and illegal.

Take the right dose

New users should take a small test dose first to check how strong they are. All users should stick within the recommended amounts for each type of mushroom, keeping in mind the difference between fresh and dried ones.

Avoid frequent use

Between once a year and once a month is the normal range.

Avoid mixing mushrooms with other drugs

Particularly alcohol and medicines.

Don't do anything dangerous when tripping

Like driving or swimming.

Help friends having 'bad trips'

Use the 5 Step Rescue Procedure. When tripping together, its better if one friend remains straight and acts as the 'ground control'.

Be responsible

If someone shows signs of mushroom poisoning or other serious illness, even days after the trip, get them to hospital asap.

If they are unconscious, put them in the recovery position first.

If possible, take samples of the mushrooms the person has swallowed, or else their vomit; to show the doctors.

Carry condoms

You may still have sex when tripping, make sure its safer sex.

Stay healthy

Take extra vitamins and nutrients after tripping. This will replace any depleted by the drugs taken, and helps to restore your brain to normal. For instance, tryptophan after psilocin trips e.g. in chicken and beans; and choline after fly Agaric trips e.g. in eggs).

for information and advice:

[R13] lifeline: publication guidelines

[→] aims
To provide information on the nature and effects of magic mushrooms in an accessible question and answer format.

[>] audience
Adults and young people engaged in recreational drug use. Use with under 16's with support.

[∨] content
Some swearing.

[£] funding
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