

The Therapeutic Potential of Ayahuasca The first studies relating to the therapeutic benefits of

ayahuasca began in the 1980s. Since that time, research has shown several potential psycho-therapeutic benefits related to pharmacological effects and to the subjective experience.



zonian vine Banisteriopsis caapi. The word "ayahuasca" is a Quechua term

What is ayahuasca?

commonly translated as "the vine of the dead" or "the rope of the dead." Different Amazonian peoples have dozens of different names for the brew and its variations, which are embedded in complex lineages of traditional practices and knowledge. » The brew is made by combining the vine with other Amazonian medicine

» Ayahuasca is a decoction of the Ama-

- plants, most commonly Psychotria viridis (chacruna) or Diplopterys cabrerana (chaliponga or chagropanga). These admixture plants are responsible for the dimethyltryptamine (DMT) found in the brew, which is made orally available by the monoamine oxidase inhibiting (MAOI) action of the beta -Carboline alkaloids.
- tion with the natural world, for divination and for strengthening social relations, and more. It is inherent to and inseparable from many Indigenous and traditional cosmologies and central to their cultural identity and political self-determination. In the last few decades, ayahuasca has traveled beyond its historical territories as people from all continents have become interested in its therapeutic and psychospiritual benefits.

chological content can be transformati-

some mechanisms of action previosuly

prove useful for the treatment of demen-

tia and a variety of neurodegenerative di-

» Positive outcomes in grief therapy, persisting at a one-year follow-up including

» Potential neuroprotective 8 and neurogenerative 9,10 properties that might

undescribed in the literature.⁷

ve and healing.³

seases.

» Amazonian people use ayahuasca as

a medicine, a channel of communica-



Effects

» Ayahuasca can boost personal deve- » Various forms of purging, such as vomiting, are sought-after effects that prolopment, psychological and emotional wellbeing, social harmony and cohesion, mote physical, emotional and energetic cleansing.1,2

How can ayahuasca be therapeutic

and spiritual or religious experiences. » Promotes "decentering," or the abili- » Confronting difficult emotional or psyty to observe thoughts and emotions as transitory events of the mind without be-

or increase wellbeing?

- ing trapped by them. » Promotes Mindfulness and Cognitive Flexibility,⁵ allowing people to contemplate events, situations and relationships
- from detached perspectives. » Ayahuasca has shown anti-depressant effects in patients with major depression, effects that were sustained for 21 days after the administration of a single dose. 6
- What is "purging" and why is it important?

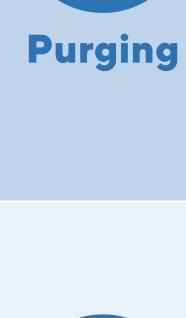
» Purging, nausea and vomiting are not » It helps the body get rid of parasites, and

participants, but rather beneficial and desirable effects.1 » It is considered an essential part of the therapeutic process. For many indigenous people, purging is the most important desired effect: it helps them stay physically, emotionally and energetically clean.²

considered adverse reactions by session

also helps process emotional states or

rid the mind from neurotic thoughts.



Mental

Health

areas related to the memory of personal events (the so-called episodic memory) and the awareness of emotions and internal sensations.¹² » Ayahuasca can boost "decentering," or the ability to observe thoughts and

Does ayahuasca improve mental health?

» The therapeutic properties of ayahuasca are likely due to a combination of its psychoactive and pharmacological actions. Ayahuasca activates brain

- emotions as transitory events of the mind without being trapped by them, increasing mindfulness and cognitive flexibility.⁵ » Most people who take ayahuasca are perfectly adapted and integrated in their social, working, and family environments and engage with ayahuasca for
- personal and spiritual growth.13



» A recent study reported anti-depres- » Ayahuasca is associated with positive sant effects of ayahuasca in patients with major depression, effects that were sustained for 21 days after a single dose.⁶

research say about

What does the

depression?

peutic change.6 » Clinical research has also shown a decrease in suicidal ideation.14

» The therapeutic effects were correlat-

- huasca treatment show cortisol levels similar to normal subjects, which can be a biological marker for the reduction of depression and suicidal ideation.¹⁵
- ed with brain changes measured with » Ayahuasca is associated with positive reneuroimaging techniques, thus providsults in patients with eating disorders, ing an objective demonstration of theraaccording to exploratory studies.¹⁶ » Ayahuasca could be used to treat

according to several authors.¹⁷

What else might it be

outcomes amongst people grieving the

loss of a loved one, with one recent study

documenting persistent effects at one-

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),

» In many Amazonian traditions, difficult

experiences are understood to be tests

provided by the plants themselves, who

challenge initiates to ensure they are pro-

essential to work with responsible and

» For access to the referred research cita-

tions, and for more detailed information

on the topics highlighted in this Fact

Sheet, please visit the latest edition of the

» For general information about ayahuas-

https://www.iceers.org/ayahuasca/

ca, it's history of use, and legal sta-

tus in various countries, please visit:

Ayahuasca Technical Report

» While these can be transformative, it is

qualified facilitators and providers.

gressing on their learning path.

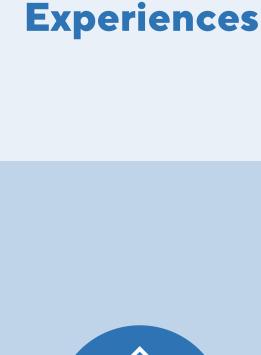
helpful for?

year follow-up.⁷

» Assessment of cortisol levels after aya- » Ayahuasca could be useful in the treatment of borderline personality disorder 18 and range of "diseases of civilization."19

Can ayahuasca help with brain health?

- » Ayahuasca has been shown to improve the symptomatology of some severe physical conditions, such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS),20 although much more evidence is needed. » Harmine, harmaline, and tetrahydroharmine (the three main constituents of Banisteropsis caapi) were found to stimulate (in vitro) adult neurogenesis, while harmine showed proliferation of human neural progenitors.²⁰ » **DMT promotes neurogenesis and neuroprotection** both in cell cultures²² and animals.²³
- Can a difficult psychological experience



References

& Resources

Difficult

ter flaws, outdated cultural, social or religious ideas, and repressed trauma.

be positive?

» Most intense difficult psychologic-

al experiences tend to be positive and

therapeutic in the long term³ and do

not lead to long-term negative conse-

» Difficult experiences can help the

participant confront shadow content,

painful memories, personality or charac-

quences, except in rare cases.

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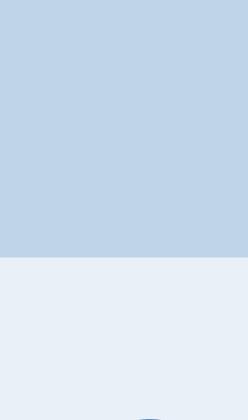
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Resources



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