

## BEHAVIOR

# Myths and Facts about Angel Dust: Did PCP Drive Aaron Hernandez to Commit Murder?

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Aaron Hernandez, former player for the NFL's New England Patriots football team, listens during a hearing at Attleboro District Court in Attleboro, Mass., August 22, 2013.

In an investigative report into the background of former New England Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez, who is awaiting trial for murder, *Rolling Stone* [reports](#) that the Massachusetts native was a regular user of PCP (phencyclidine), known as “angel dust” or “wet.”

Although PCP’s street name links it to heaven, the drug is notorious for its association with devilish and extremely gruesome violent crimes. Is its dark reputation justified? We separated fact from fiction.

**PCP leads to [cannibalism](#), [decapitations](#) and [eye gouging](#)**

*Myth.* Research suggests that, like alcohol, it mainly increases aggressive behavior in those already prone to it. The drug can induce psychotic delusions and paranoid behavior. But most users remain unthreatening in the face of these disorienting experiences, even placid.

**PCP gives users superhuman strength — enough to break out of handcuffs**

*Myth.* Police and emergency room personnel are familiar with the bizarre, unpredictable and violent behavior of some PCP users. Their failure to comply with orders and their resistance to being restrained creates the illusion that the drug makes them stronger; some officers have even claimed that the drug gives people the ability to break out of metal handcuffs.

But there’s no evidence that PCP actually increases muscle power— the single study done on the subject in mice found a drop in grip strength among animals given the drug. And, scientists say, there are no plausible mechanisms to explain how PCP could affect strength.

## **PCP users feel no pain**

*Partial Fact.* As an anesthetic, the drug dramatically reduces pain, but it may not make people completely pain-free without also rendering them unconscious.

## **PCP gives users hallucinations.**

*Fact.* Pharmacologically, PCP is a type of anesthetic, in the same class of drugs as the Food and Drug Administration-approved anesthetic ketamine (also known as the club drug Special K) and the nitrous oxide you can get at the dentist (laughing gas). In low doses that don't produce unconsciousness, it can trigger disorientation and a sense of disconnectedness from the body. The drug can also lead to delusions, hallucinations, loss of motor control and, in Hernandez's case, according to what his friends told *Rolling Stone*, paranoia.

## **PCP use is waning.**

*Fact.* PCP was once much more popular than it is now — in 1979, 7% of high school seniors reported having taken it in the past year, while less than 1% do today. However, there are still regions where it remains common. These tend to be high poverty, high crime areas in big East Coast cities such as Washington, DC, Baltimore and Philadelphia. In these cities, about 10% of people who are arrested test positive for the drug, now known as “wet” because it is an oily liquid— typically, people soak marijuana in it in order to smoke it.

Whether Hernandez was affected by PCP at the time of his alleged crime will be up to the court dissect. In the article, Hernandez's friends claim that the drug made Hernandez paranoid enough that he thought people were plotting to kill him, so he began carrying a gun. But given the erratic behavior that PCP generally triggers, connecting the murder, which prosecutors say Hernandez carefully orchestrated and plotted, to the drug may be a challenge.

<http://healthland.time.com/2013/08/28/myths-and-facts-about-angel-dust-did-pcp-drive-aaron-hernandez-to-commit-murder/>