

## Local family warns about dangers of bath salts

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(Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of articles detailing the dangers of synthetic drugs.)

Chris Dowdy admits he is lucky to be alive.

Nearly a year ago the 26-year-old Ithaca resident spent a three-day weekend with a relative in another state.

However, that short vacation would turn into a months-long living hell for Dowdy and his parents, Robin and Mike Losee.

During his visit Dowdy smoked bath salts, a synthetic drug that's not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and sold legally at many gas stations, convenience stores and online.

"I didn't even know what it was," Dowdy said. "But it gets you like 10 times higher than smoking weed but it only lasts about 10 minutes or so. You get zoned out. I couldn't talk."

However, he didn't start experiencing any symptoms or complications until a few days after returning home.

"I felt really exhausted," Dowdy said. "I was paranoid. I thought the cops were after me, that I committed some heinous crime. When I'd wake up in the morning I thought I had gone out and did some crazy stuff."

"The visuals started kicking in about two weeks afterwards. I thought I was possessed by a bad spirit. I felt very agitated. I couldn't stop moving, just rocking back and forth. I had no idea what was going on. I didn't know what reality was. It was the worst trip ever."

His parents also had no clue what was happening to their son.

"He got sent home from work at his internship in St. Johns and he didn't even know why," Robin Losee said. "He began acting differently. He had short term memory loss. You would tell him something and five minutes later he wouldn't remember."

"All of a sudden he started hearing voices and he thought the TV was talking to him."

Dowdy would go lay in his bed and start shouting "get out of here" when no one else was in the room, Mike Losee said.

They finally took their son to Sparrow Hospital in Lansing and he was admitted to the psychiatric ward.

Initially, medical experts were even stumped by what was causing Dowdy's actions.

"When I was in the hospital it took seven guys to put me in restraints," he said. "It was like being on meth, you had this superhuman strength.

"At one point I thought I was in hell and the doctor was Satan. Another time I thought I was a 300-pound obese man with 12 kids and heard other voices. There were about eight other people in the hospital with me and I thought I was them."

At first, doctors thought he was schizophrenic because no drugs showed up in any of the tests they ran.

Then, after two or three days, Dowdy casually mentioned to his mother that he had smoked "Black Widow," a brand of bath salts while visiting his relative.

"I had never heard of it," Robin Losee said. "I was told it was like synthetic LSD. You don't even know what's been put in it. It affects everyone differently. He was hearing voices and having hallucinations."

Dowdy was placed on medication and released from the hospital two weeks later.

"He wasn't ready but the insurance company wouldn't authorize a longer stay," his mother said. "We had to take him home."

The ordeal was far from over.

For the next two-and-a-half months his dad had to watch over Dowdy 24 hours a day.

"He was like Rainman, he could remember long term things but nothing short term," Mike Losee said. "He couldn't be left alone. It was like having a grown man turn into a little boy. He had to be taught how to do things all over again."

But Dowdy was one of the fortunate ones. With the help of a therapist, psychologist and psychiatrist he has fully recovered.

He returned to classes at Central Michigan University in January and graduated last month with a degree in sociology and criminal justice. He recently joined the Michigan National Guard.

"I'm very proud of him," his mother said. "I thank God. We've had a lot of support. There were a lot of prayers, a lot of prayers."

Dowdy is also thankful.

“If not for my parents I would have never gotten through this,” he said. “I was out of it. Who knows what would have happened. I could have died.”

In addition to bath salts other popular synthetic drugs include potpourri, incense, plant food, lazy cakes, downer drinks and synthetic marijuana. They are marketed under various names and sold legally over the counter.

That’s one reason Dowdy and his parents wanted to tell their story.

“People need to know what’s going on, the hell this stuff puts you through,” Robin Losee said. “The problem is they can’t get it off the market. They just change what’s in it and call it something else. It’s readily available and they are making a boat load of money on it.”

Parents need to “get to know” their children so they can detect any abnormal changes in their behavior, she added.

“There are warning signs,” she said. “You just have to be aware of them. This stuff can be deadly. Parents need to know when something is not right.”