

What is cannabis?

Cannabis (often called marijuana) comes from the cannabis plant. It contains the active ingredient delta-9 TetraHydroCannabinol (THC), which affects brain function. The flowers and leaves of the cannabis plant are dried, then smoked or eaten for the psychoactive effects of THC, which can alter perception and mood. The dried flowers (heads) of the cannabis plant have a high THC concentration. Cannabis oil, which can be extracted from the heads or leaves of the plant, is a concentrated form of cannabis and also has high levels of THC. Hashish is made from the resin of the plant. Cannabis is a depressant drug that reduces brain activity.

Effects

During use

The effects felt during use can be both desired and undesired. For most people who use cannabis, the desired effect is a feeling of well-being. People who use cannabis often talk and laugh a lot and experience an altered perception of time. Increased appetite, dry mouth and bloodshot eyes are a few of the common and recognisable effects of using cannabis.

Harmful effects

Even a small amount of THC can cause:

- > poor concentration and problem solving
- > short-term memory loss
- > slower reaction times
- > increases in heart rate, respiratory rate and blood pressure
- > anxiety and paranoia.

Overdose - what to look out for

A person who is inexperienced or who has used an amount of the drug that exceeds his or her tolerance for the substance can experience an extreme case of intoxication causing impaired coordination, confusion, anxiety or panic attacks, and feelings of paranoia (irrational distrust). People who frequently use large amounts of cannabis can experience psychotic reactions. While these are rare, symptoms include confusion, delusion, hallucinations and anxiety.

If someone is experiencing any of the above signs, **phone 000** immediately for medical attention. Police will not attend unless the ambulance officers call for help or a death occurs.

Effects form long-term use

- > less motivation or energy
- > chronic cough and respiratory problems, if smoked
- > risk of lung, throat and oral cancers, if smoked
- > reduced fertility and sex drive
- > increased risk of heart attack
- > increased risk of problems during pregnancy and delivery
- > mood swings
- > social problems
 - > poor school or work performance
 - > family and relationship problems
 - > legal repercussions
 - > financial problems.

Effects of long-term use on adolescent development

Long-term use of cannabis impairs the ability of young people to learn and develop social skills. Performance at school or work can also suffer. Difficulties with concentration, memory and learning may occur. These problems can gradually disappear once cannabis use stops.

Cannabis and schizophrenia

People with schizophrenia or other mental health conditions should avoid using cannabis as it is likely to aggravate their symptoms. People with a family history of schizophrenia should also avoid using cannabis.

Duration of effects during use

The effects of cannabis when it is smoked can begin immediately or within a few minutes and last for a few hours. When eaten, the effects are within one to two hours but can last longer and be more intense.

Dependence

Using cannabis daily or almost every day, over a period of time, leads to physical and psychological changes in the body.

The body adapts or 'gets used to' having cannabis on a regular basis. This is the basis of tolerance. People who are tolerant need more of the drug to achieve the same effects, but increasing the dose also increases the likelihood of adverse effects.

The key feature of dependence is a loss of control over use. People who are dependent spend a lot of time thinking about drugs, obtaining and using drugs, and recovering from the effects. They find it difficult to reduce or stop drug use, even when they are aware of the related problems.

Cannabis and the law

It is illegal to keep, use, grow, sell or give away cannabis, cannabis oil or cannabis resin.

Minor offences relating to personal possession or use of cannabis or cannabis resin or related smoking equipment by adults can be dealt with by paying an on-the-spot fine, which means avoiding a criminal conviction.

Under the section 47 of the *Road Traffic Act 1961*, it is an offence to drive or attempt to drive a motor vehicle under the influence of a drug. Drugs in your system make driving extremely dangerous because they impair coordination, reduce reaction time, and affect your vision and ability to judge distance and speed.

For more information about cannabis and the law, visit the SA Health website www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Health topics > Legal matters > Illicit drug laws.

Further information

Risks of using drugs - visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Healthy Living > Is your health at risk? > The risks of using drugs.

Medicinal cannabis - visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Health topics > Medicines > Medicinal cannabis.

Phone the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on 1300 13 1340 between 8.30am and 10pm for confidential telephone counselling, information and referral.

For more information

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Phone: 1300 13 1340
Confidential telephone counselling and information available between 8.30am and 10pm every day.
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa

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