

# what is cannabis?

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Cannabis is derived from the cannabis plant (*cannabis sativa*). It grows wild in many of the tropical and temperate areas of the world. It can be grown in almost any climate, and is increasingly cultivated by means of indoor hydroponic technology.

The main active ingredient in cannabis is called delta-9 tetrahydro-cannabinol, commonly known as THC. This is the part of the plant that gives the 'high'. There is a wide range of THC potency between cannabis products.

Cannabis is used in three main forms: marijuana, hashish and hash oil. Marijuana is made from dried flowers and leaves of the cannabis plant. It is the least potent of all the cannabis products and is usually smoked. Hashish is made from the resin (a secreted gum) of the cannabis plant. It is dried and pressed into small blocks and smoked. It can also be added to food and eaten. Hash oil, the most potent cannabis product, is a thick oil obtained from hashish. It is also smoked.

Cannabis is usually smoked in hand-rolled cigarettes (known as 'joints') or in special waterpipes ('bongs'). These pipes or bongs can be bought or made from things such as orange juice containers, soft drink cans or even toilet rolls.

## how many people use cannabis?

Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in Australia. According to the 2007 National Drug Household Survey, 33.5% of the Australian population reported using cannabis at some time, with 9.1% having used it in the last 12 months. More than 600,000 Australians used cannabis in the previous week.

- 20% of 14-19 year olds reported ever using cannabis
- 49.5% of 20-29 year olds reported ever using the drug

The average age at first use was 18.8 years.

The proportion of secondary school students reporting using cannabis has decreased in recent years. However, the 2004 Secondary School Survey still found that cannabis was the most commonly used illicit substance by this group, with 18% of all secondary school students aged between 12 and 17 years reporting using the drug at some time in their life.

Cannabis use increased with age from 5% of 12-year-olds who had ever used cannabis to 32% of 17-year-olds.

- 35% of 17 year old males reported ever using cannabis
- 30% of 17 year old females reported ever using cannabis
- 5% of 12 year old males reported ever using cannabis
- 4% of 12 year old females reported ever using cannabis

# what is cannabis? Fact sheet 1

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## other names for cannabis

Cannabis is also known as marijuana, grass, pot, dope, Mary Jane, hooch, weed, hash, joints, brew, reefers, cones, smoke, mull, buddha, ganga, hydro, yarndi, heads and green.

## why do people use cannabis?

Most people who use cannabis do so to experience a sense of mild euphoria and relaxation, often referred to as a 'high'. Cannabis causes changes in the user's mood and also affects how they think and perceive the environment, e.g. everyday activities such as watching the television and listening to music can become altered and more intense.

## what are the short-term effects of cannabis?

The short-term effects of using cannabis may include:

- feeling of well-being
- talkativeness
- drowsiness
- loss of inhibitions
- decreased nausea
- increased appetite
- loss of co-ordination
- bloodshot eyes
- dryness of the eyes, mouth and throat
- anxiety and paranoia

## what are the long-term effects of cannabis?

There is limited research on the long-term effects of cannabis. On the available evidence, the major probable adverse effects are:

- increased risk of respiratory diseases associated with smoking, including cancer
- decreased memory and learning abilities
- decreased motivation in areas such as study, work or concentration

There is also much concern about the link between cannabis use and mental health problems and the risk of dependence. For further information on these issues please refer to Cannabis Fact Sheets 3 and 6.