

fast facts on

cannabis

ncpic

national cannabis
prevention and
information centre

what is cannabis?

Cannabis is an illegal drug derived from the plant *cannabis sativa*. 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'.

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.

what are the short-term effects of cannabis?

Cannabis affects different people in different ways. It can be influenced by many things including how much of the drug is taken, the environment it is used in, as well as the weight, size and mood of the person using it.

The short-term effects of using cannabis may include:

- a feeling of well-being
- talkativeness
- drowsiness
- loss of inhibitions (doing or saying things one usually wouldn't)
- 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?

Like any drug, there is no way of knowing how the drug will affect the user in the long-term. However, on the available evidence, the main probable negative effects are:

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

is cannabis stronger than it used to be?

Although the potency of cannabis overall may have increased by a small amount, the range of THC levels is now greater than in the past. There is little evidence to suggest, however, that it has increased as dramatically as has been reported.

Reports of increased strength could be explained by changes in the way the drug is used and the increased availability of the stronger part of the plant, particularly the flowering heads or buds.

Some people believe that hydroponically grown cannabis is more potent than cannabis grown 'naturally'. There has also been some discussion that the reported difference could be due to cultivation techniques, chemicals and fertilizers used by hydroponic growers. There is currently no evidence to support these theories.

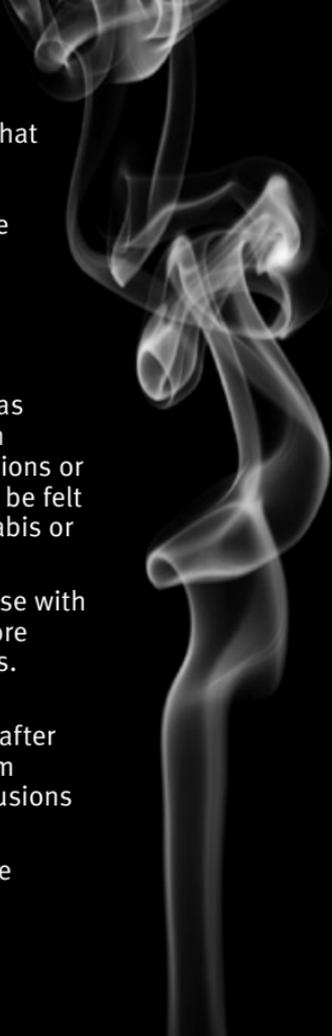
what do we know about cannabis and mental health?

Some people experience unpleasant effects such as anxiety and panic when they use cannabis. In high doses, use of the drug can cause confusion, delusions or hallucinations. These symptoms are more likely to be felt by people who are not used to the effects of cannabis or who have smoked more than they usually do.

Some people, particularly younger people and those with a family history of mental health problems, are more vulnerable to the mental health effects of cannabis.

Although it is rare, some people may experience a short-term psychotic episode (a split from reality) after a heavy session of cannabis use. This can last from several hours up to 2-3 days, and may include delusions or hallucinations.

Frequent cannabis use has been shown to increase the risk of psychotic illness and the development of depression.



can you become dependent on cannabis?

Around one in ten people who ever try cannabis will become dependent on it at some time in their lives. It has been estimated that around 200,000 Australian adults are dependent on cannabis.

People who use daily are most at risk, facing about a one in two chance of becoming dependent. Young people are at even greater risk if they use cannabis daily. Dependent users can experience a variety of psychological, social and physical symptoms including withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms include feeling irritable, anxious and depressed, sleeping problems and decreased appetite.

do many people need treatment for their cannabis use?

As the number of cannabis users who have problems with their use has increased, so have the number of people seeking treatment. Cannabis continues to be the illegal drug that most people seek treatment for in Australia.

People request treatment because of the physical, mental or social effects of cannabis use, and/or because they feel they have become dependent on it.



what treatment is available?

Compared to other drugs, there are fewer specific treatments available for cannabis-related problems. Most involve counselling, although various drug treatment options are being investigated.

what are the effects of passive cannabis smoking?

Traces of cannabis can be found in body fluids as a result of passive cannabis smoking but most testing companies report that these traces are too low to register as a 'positive' test.

Cannabis smoke contains many of the dangerous substances that are found in tobacco smoke, such as tar, carbon monoxide and cancer-causing chemicals, some in higher amounts. Therefore those who associate with cannabis smokers can experience similar problems to those experienced by passive tobacco smokers.

which is worse, smoking tobacco or smoking cannabis?

Smoking anything is damaging to your health. Smoking either drug over time can cause a range of serious respiratory and other health problems. Both tobacco and cannabis smoke contain agents that increase the risk of cancer.

Most people who try cannabis have previously used tobacco and many current cannabis smokers also smoke cigarettes. Smoking both cannabis and tobacco results in a greater health risk than smoking either alone.

does cannabis use lead to the use of other drugs?

Most people who use illicit drugs first used substances like alcohol, tobacco or cannabis. However, the vast majority of people who use cigarettes, alcohol or cannabis never use other illegal drugs.

Nevertheless, cannabis use, particularly regular use at a younger age, increases the risk of other drug use.

does cannabis affect driving skills?

All drugs affect the user's perception. Altered perception can have a gravely negative effect on driving skills.

Cannabis affects a person's ability to react and pay attention on the road. Latest evidence reports that driving under the influence of cannabis appears to increase the risk of motor vehicle crashes by a factor of two or three times.

isn't cannabis legal in some parts of Australia?

Cannabis is an illegal drug throughout Australia. Each state and territory has its own laws for cannabis offences.

Some jurisdictions have decriminalised minor cannabis offences. This means that the offence can be dealt with by a civil penalty, such as a fine, rather than by receiving a criminal charge. However, there is no jurisdiction in the country where cannabis is legal.

what are the medical benefits of cannabis?

Cannabis does not 'cure' any illness, but it appears to relieve the symptoms of certain medical problems. Research has indicated that cannabis may be most useful for conditions such as pain relief, nausea and vomiting, wasting or severe weight loss, and neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis.

Although people have reportedly used cannabis for medical purposes, it has not been approved as a therapeutic product anywhere in the world.

if I know someone who has a problem with cannabis, or I need help myself, where can I go?

The Cannabis Information and Helpline provides a nationally available free call service for people who use cannabis themselves or those concerned about the cannabis use of a friend or family member. Callers will receive reliable evidence-based information and support and advice about how to communicate with users and help engage them in interventions.

the cannabis information and helpline is

1800 30 40 50

the ncpic website is

www.ncpic.org.au