

Cannabis ●

What is cannabis?

Cannabis is classified as a cannabinoid drug. The exact number of different cannabinoids in the cannabis sativa plant is still being researched, but it primarily contains the psychoactive cannabinoid THC (delta9 tetrahydrocannabinol) and the non-psychoactive cannabidiol (CBD).¹

Other names

Marijuana, yarrdi, pot, weed, hash, dope, gunja, joint, stick, chronic, cone, choof, dabs, dabbing, BHO.

How is it used?

Cannabis can be smoked, eaten or vaporized and comes in different forms. Users report that the subjective effects of cannabis vary significantly depending on the form consumed.²

- **Marijuana** – the dried plant that is smoked in a joint or a bong. This is the most common form.
- **Hashish** – the dried plant resin that is usually mixed with tobacco and smoked or added to foods and baked; such as cookies and brownies.
- **Hash oil** – liquid that is usually added to the tip of a cigarette and smoked.¹
- **Concentrates** – extracts (dabs, wax or shatter) typically using butane hash oil as a solvent, often vaporized in small quantities due to high THC content.

Cannabis can be prepared into various foods generally called ‘edibles’. It takes between 1-3 hours to feel the effects after eating cannabis.² Impatient or naïve users may believe they have not taken enough to feel the effects, and if they consume more they may find later that the psychoactive effects are unpleasantly strong. When edible products have inconsistent levels of THC even experienced users may find it difficult to regulate the amount consumed.

When smoked or vaporized, the effects are usually felt straight away.³ There are health concerns about the impact of smoking, especially in the long term, especially if mixed with tobacco.

Cannabis can also come in synthetic form, which may be more harmful than real cannabis.

Effects of cannabis

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It’s important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Cannabis affects every individual differently. Even the same person may have a different experience on separate occasions or over the course of their life. Some of the factors that influence these differences appear to be:^{3,4}

- size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount taken
- the strength of the drug
- expectations of consuming cannabis
- the environment of the individual
- the individual’s personality.

The effects of cannabis vary between people, and may even be different for the same person at different times. Some people report feelings of relaxation and euphoria while other people report experiences of anxiety and paranoia.⁴

The effects of cannabis may be felt immediately if smoked, or within an hour or two if eaten and effects may include:^{3,4}

- feelings of relaxation and euphoria
- spontaneous laughter and excitement
- increased sociability
- increased appetite
- dry mouth.

If a large amount, strong batch, or concentrated form is consumed, you may be more likely to also experience:^{2,3,4}

- memory impairment
- slower reflexes
- bloodshot eyes
- increased heart rate
- mild anxiety and paranoia.

Long-term effects

Long-term effects are dependent on how much and how often the cannabis is consumed and may also be affected by how the cannabis is consumed (e.g. vaporising a concentrate versus smoking the flower).² Heavy, regular use of cannabis may eventually cause:^{5,6}

- tolerance to the effects of cannabis
- dependence on cannabis
- reduced cognitive functioning.

Regular, high-dose smoking of cannabis may increase the likelihood of experiencing:⁷

- sore throat
- asthma
- bronchitis
- and if smoked with tobacco, cancer.

Those with a family history of mental illness are more likely to also experience anxiety, depression and psychotic symptoms after using cannabis. Psychotic symptoms include delusions, hallucinations and seeing or hearing things that do not exist or are distorted.

Using cannabis with other drugs

The effects of taking cannabis with other drugs – including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable.

Cannabis + alcohol: potential nausea, vomiting.⁴

Cannabis is sometimes used to help with the ‘come down’ effects of stimulant drugs, such as ice, speed and ecstasy. This may result in a cycle of dependence on both types of drugs.

Withdrawal

Giving up cannabis after regular, heavy use over a long time is challenging, because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Withdrawal symptoms may last for only a week, but sleep may be affected for longer. Symptoms include:⁸

- anxiety
- irritability
- loss of appetite and upset stomach
- sweating, chills and tremors
- restless sleep and nightmares.

Read more about withdrawal at adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/withdrawal/

Medicinal cannabis

Medicinal cannabis is cannabis prescribed to relieve the symptoms of a medical condition, such as epilepsy. It is a quality-controlled product with labelled levels of cannabinoids such as THC and CBD. Recently legislation has been passed in Australia to facilitate access to medicinal cannabis for certain medical conditions.

Read more about medicinal cannabis at adf.org.au/drug-facts/medical-cannabis/

Cannabis and the law

Federal and state laws provide penalties for possessing, using, making or selling cannabis, or driving under the influence.

There are also laws that prevent the sale and possession of bongs and other smoking equipment in some states and territories.

Certain states in Australia have passed laws to allow access to medicinal cannabis for very specific conditions.

Cannabis statistics

National

- 34.8% of Australians aged 14 years and over have used cannabis one or more times in their life.⁹
- 10.4% of Australians aged 14 years and over have used cannabis in the previous 12 months.⁹

Young people

- Most young people do not use cannabis – 68.7% of 12-17 year olds have never tried it.¹⁰

References

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9. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2017. *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016: detailed findings*. Canberra: AIHW.
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Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected: tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

Other help, support services and resources

Links to further help and support • adf.org.au/help-support/

Information on different types of cannabis • adf.org.au/insights/various-cannabis-use/

For information on treatment

There are a range treatment services available to support the recovery from alcohol and drug misuse. To find out more information about treatment services in your area, contact the alcohol and drug intake and assessment service.

ACSO • 1300 022 760

(9am–5pm Monday–Friday)

DirectLine is also available to provide free and confidential information, counselling and referral for alcohol and drug issues 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

DirectLine • 1800 888 236 • www.directline.org.au

● Further information

DrugInfo • 1300 85 85 84

Free confidential information and advice about alcohol and other drugs (9am - 5pm, Mon-Fri)

Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • www.familydrughelp.com.au (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • www.fds.org.au (Australia-wide)



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