

Cannabis

Cannabis is derived from Indian Hemp plants. Its main active chemical component is THC (delta 9-tetrahydrocannabinol). This is the component which makes you feel *'high'*.

The cannabis plant is bright green and its distinctive leaves are bright green with five or seven leaflets. The flowering tops and upper leaves are covered in a sticky resin.

There are three main forms of cannabis.

- **Marijuana** is the dried leaves and flowers of the plant. This is the most common and least potent form of cannabis.
- **Hashish (hash)** is dried cannabis resin, usually in the form of a small block. The concentration of THC is higher in hash than in marijuana.
- **Hash oil** is a thick oily liquid, golden brown to black in colour which is extracted from the cannabis plant. Hash oil is the strongest form of cannabis.
- **Synthetic cannabis (cannabinoids)** are synthetic drugs that mimics the effects of cannabis. These are man-made chemicals that have been sprayed on organic material to look like dried herbs. They are generally smoked, or occasionally drunk as tea. 'Spice' was the earliest version of synthetic cannabis sold in Australia. Since then a number of products have been developed.

Other names

Grass, pot, hash, weed, reefer, dope, herb, mull, Buddha, ganja, buckets, cones, skunk, hydro and hooch.

Immediate effects

- Loss of inhibition, spontaneous laughter
- Relaxation. quiet and reflective mood
- Blurred vision, clumsiness, slower reflexes
- Changes to perception including sound, colour and other sensations
- Increased appetite
- Sleepiness
- Confusion, anxiety, hallucinations
- Mild paranoia
- Low blood pressure

Cannabis use can significantly impair your ability to drive or operate machinery.

Long term effects

Long term cannabis use has the potential to cause serious physical and mental health issues.

Effects can include:

- Impaired concentration, memory and learning
- Asthma, bronchitis, chronic obstructive lung disease from smoking
- Regular colds and flu
- Low sex drive, difficulty having children
- Financial, work, social and legal problems
- Mood swings

- Drug induced psychosis in people who are vulnerable to psychotic symptoms

Withdrawal symptoms

Withdrawal symptoms may occur when you stop using cannabis after a period of regular heavy use, because the body needs to get used to functioning without the cannabis. Symptoms generally last for less than a week although sleep disturbance may continue for longer.

Symptoms may include

- Cravings for cannabis
- Loss of appetite, weight loss
- Irritability, anxiety
- Sweating, chills, tremors
- Disturbed restless sleep, nightmares.

Cannabis and other drugs

The effects of using cannabis with other drugs can be unpredictable and dangerous.

- Combining cannabis with alcohol can increase the risk of nausea, vomiting, anxiety, panic and paranoia and can significantly reduce your ability to drive or operate machinery.
- Combining cannabis with tobacco can lead to the same health problems as smoking cigarettes and you may become dependent on the tobacco making it harder to cut down or quit.

Legal issues

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.