



Marijuana or cannabis

Marijuana facts at a glance

The signs and symptoms of using marijuana can include:

- Slow thinking
- Slow reflexes
- Reduced coordination
- Problems concentrating
- Reduced motivation
- Dilated pupils
- Bloodshot or glassy eyes
- Dryness of the mouth
- Increased appetite
- Mood swings
- Panic attacks
- Anxiety and paranoia
- Psychosis
- Hallucinations
- Delusions

The consequences of using marijuana may include:

- Dependence
- Anxiety and depression
- Sleep problems
- Lowered sex drive
- Learning difficulties and poorer educational outcomes
- Memory problems
- Respiratory illnesses such as chronic cough and bronchitis
- Increased risk of cancer of the lung, mouth, throat and tongue
- Paranoia and other psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations with increased risk of developing schizophrenia

What is it?

Marijuana (cannabis) primarily comes from the cannabis plant (cannabis sativa). The cannabis plant is also used to produce hashish (hash) and hash oil. Of the three, marijuana (cannabis) is the most common and least powerful but is still capable of causing a variety of physical and mental problems resulting from intoxication and long-term use.

Marijuana (cannabis) is known by a variety of other names, including: pot, grass, weed, ya(r)ndi, rope, mull, dope, skunk, bhang, ganja, hash, chronic, reefer, joint, cone or spliff.

Physical effects

Marijuana (cannabis) produces a 'high' that generally makes the user feel more relaxed, happy and more talkative. It can also increase appetite.

When cannabis is used, THC is the main active chemical constituent absorbed into the bloodstream. THC crosses into the bloodstream and acts on the brain, flooding the receptors with the brain's reward chemicals and producing the 'high' effect.

Problems

Short term:	Long term:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty concentrating• Impaired motor skills• Slow reflexes• Reduced coordination• Bloodshot or glassy eyes• Dryness of the mouth• Paranoia• Anxiety• Decreased motivation• Hallucinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dependence• Increased risk of respiratory illnesses (chronic bronchitis and lung, mouth, throat and tongue cancers)• Lowered sex drive• Impact on sperm count for males• Irregular menstrual cycles for females• Low birth weight babies• Memory loss• Learning difficulties• Lower educational attainment• Mood swings• Psychosis and psychotic symptoms• Suicidal thoughts

Problems associated with marijuana (cannabis) use are more common in those who first use at an early age and use higher doses for longer periods of time.

Marijuana (cannabis) use can also lead to deterioration in the condition of people with pre-existing mental illnesses and symptoms of schizophrenia.

As well as the serious physical and mental problems that marijuana (cannabis) use can cause, it can also lead to social and financial problems, poorer educational outcomes and the breakdown of relationships with family and friends.

Dependence on marijuana (cannabis)

When someone uses marijuana (cannabis) regularly they usually develop a tolerance for the drug. This means they have to use more to get the same effect as their brain has become used to functioning with the drug present.

One of the main symptoms of cannabis dependence is a loss of control over use. People crave the drug and find it difficult to stop using it.

If a person is dependent on marijuana (cannabis) and suddenly stops using it, they usually experience withdrawal symptoms, as their body readjusts to functioning without the drug. These symptoms usually last for less than a week, although people experience difficulties with concentration, memory and learning, plus problems sleeping for a longer period.

Marijuana (cannabis) withdrawal symptoms may include:

- irritability, anxiety and nervousness
- anger and aggression
- loss of appetite
- excessive sweating (particularly at night)
- disturbed and restless sleep with strange nightmares.

The National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) (www.ncpic.org.au) provides information and advice about cannabis.