



Australian Government



MARIJUANA (CANNABIS)

Marijuana comes from the cannabis plant (*cannabis sativa*). The main active ingredient is 'delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol' (THC). 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 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.

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
- blood shot 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.

Physical effects of using marijuana

Where marijuana is used, the chemical THC is absorbed into the bloodstream, through the lungs (if smoked) or through the lining of the stomach or intestines (if eaten). The bloodstream carries the THC to the brain, flooding the receptors with the brain's reward chemicals and producing the 'high' effect.

Problems from using marijuana

In the short term using marijuana can lead to difficulty concentrating, impaired motor skills, slow reflexes, reduced coordination, bloodshot or glassy eyes and dryness of the mouth.

Longer term, users face the physical problems of increased risk of respiratory illnesses including chronic bronchitis and lung, mouth, throat and tongue cancers. Marijuana can also affect reproductive function, including lowered sex drive and sperm count for males, irregular menstrual cycles for females and low birth weight babies. THC crosses the placenta and is also secreted in breast milk.

Marijuana has also been shown to pose serious potential risks to mental health. Problems can include memory loss, learning difficulties, mood swings, paranoia, anxiety, decreased motivation, hallucinations, dependence, psychosis and psychotic symptoms, and suicidal thoughts. Marijuana use can also lead to a 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 use can cause, it can also lead to social and financial problems, poorer educational outcomes and the breakdown of relationships with family and friends.

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

Dependence on marijuana

When someone uses marijuana 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 marijuana 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, as well as problems sleeping.