

# Cannabis: Important things to know

*substance use* *drugs* *cannabis*

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Cannabis is a drug that can affect your mind and body. It's important to learn about the health effects, the legal issues and ways to lower health and other risks, if you choose to use it.

## What is cannabis?

Cannabis (also known as marijuana, weed or pot) is a drug that comes from a plant. It contains the chemicals THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (cannabidiol), which have short- and long-term effects. People use cannabis for different reasons and it can be authorized by a doctor or nurse practitioner as a medical treatment.

## How do people use cannabis?

Cannabis can be consumed in a variety of ways and in a variety of forms:

- inhaled through smoke or vapour (with almost immediate effect)
- taken through food (edibles), liquids or capsules (may take up to a few hours to take effect)



## How does cannabis make you feel?

The effects you may experience after using cannabis will vary, depending on how much of each chemical is included and how your body reacts to them.

Cannabis can have varying mental, emotional and physical effects, especially for people under 25. Everyone reacts to it differently. Factors that contribute to your experience with cannabis may include:

- genetics
- medical history (including family history)
- how often you use it
- how you take it
- how much you take
- its levels of THC/CBD

The effects of cannabis may also be experienced on a range, or vary each time depending on how it's consumed. For example, ingesting cannabis (edibles) takes longer to feel the effects (up to a few hours) so it's important to be aware of how much you are consuming, if you choose to use cannabis.

### Short-term effects may include:

- **Mental effects:** you may be more anxious or more relaxed. You may experience paranoia, delusions, hallucinations, fear and changes in thinking or ability to make decisions.
- **Emotional effects:** you may feel "high," happy or euphoric. It may also impact how you interact socially (you may be more



personable/outgoing, or more quiet/subdued). You may feel numb, or no emotions at all.

- **Physical effects:** you may feel sleepy or hungry. If you're feeling physical pain before using cannabis, it may be reduced after use. You may experience an increased heart rate, body tremors or red eyes. Your senses — what you see, hear, feel, taste and smell — may be heightened.

The effects of cannabis may be increased if it's used often or taken with alcohol or other drugs. It's important to know what — and how much — you're taking in order to stay safe.

There are also some long-term effects associated with cannabis use. These effects will vary depending on the person, their frequency of use and the age they started using. Using cannabis at an early age (before the age of 18) increases the risk for long-term effects.

Evidence shows that using cannabis regularly before the age of 25 may affect brain development. This may lead to long-term problems with memory, cognition and attention. It may also affect your ability to think and make decisions in all aspects of your life including school, recreational activities and relationships. In certain cases, cannabis use may trigger a psychotic episode (a condition in which the person does not know what is real and what is not real).

#### **Long-term effects may also include:**

- lung damage (if cannabis is inhaled), including chronic cough and bronchitis



- psychosis in individuals with a personal or family history of mental illness
- addiction or a dependency on cannabis

You may experience some, all or none of these effects.

Keep in mind that some mental health disorders first present themselves when you're in your teens. If you feel like you're using cannabis to manage symptoms or cope, you may want to seek support from a medical professional or call a Kids Help Phone counsellor at 1-800-668-6868.

## **Is cannabis legal?**

In Canada, any non-medical cannabis use is called "recreational use" and is currently illegal. However, the Government of Canada has plans to legalize and regulate cannabis later in 2018. Once it becomes legal, the laws defining its use will resemble those of alcohol and tobacco. There will be restrictions on age and where cannabis can be used.

The medical use of cannabis, when authorized by a health care practitioner, is currently legal in Canada. Cannabis is authorized as a medical treatment for many different reasons. Like with any other medication, if you're authorized to use medical cannabis, it's important to take it as directed.

If you have any questions about cannabis, you can talk to your doctor, teacher, parent/caregiver or a Kids Help Phone counsellor for more information.

## **What about driving?**



Driving while high (e.g. after smoking or consuming cannabis) is illegal in Canada. It's classified as impaired driving and is penalized in the same way as drinking and driving. Even small amounts of cannabis can affect your attention, reaction time and ability to judge distances, even if you don't feel "high." It's important not to drive after using cannabis because your brain needs to be alert and focused. You also want to avoid getting into a car with a driver who has used cannabis.

## How can I get support?

If you use cannabis, it's important to know how to stay healthy, keep yourself safe and get support. Here are some strategies that can lower your risk, if you choose to use cannabis:

- avoid mixing cannabis with alcohol or other drugs as this can drastically intensify its effects
- try the "low and slow" approach, or a little bit over a longer period of time, when consuming cannabis (edibles), as it takes longer to feel the effects (up to a few hours)
- let a safe adult know where you'll be and plan a safe way home
- avoid using cannabis while doing activities that require your attention, like driving or studying
- try to take breaks or "days off" from cannabis use to reduce the long-term impacts on your health
- consider alternatives to smoking cannabis to reduce damage to your lungs
- visit Resources Around Me to search for drugs and alcohol support services in your community



*It's important to have all of the information about cannabis in order to use it safely. If you have questions/concerns about cannabis and your health, you can talk to a friend, doctor or parent/caregiver. You can always call a Kids Help Phone counsellor at 1-800-668-6868 if you need support.*

