



# CANNABIS THE FACTS

## WHAT IS CANNABIS?

Cannabis comes from a plant called cannabis sativa. Other names include weed, pot, hash, dope, gunja, bud, joint.

Cannabis contains two main active ingredients:

- » THC (delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol)
- » CBD (cannabidiol)

THC is the psychoactive chemical that affects the way you think, feel and behave. CBD has no psychoactive effects.

## SHORT TERM EFFECTS

A person's brain chemistry, genetics and life experience can determine how they experience the drug.

Cannabis can:

- » Impact your mood, it may make you feel relaxed and sleepy, and even laugh a lot
- » Increase your heart rate, and cause headache, dizziness, nausea
- » Impair memory, balance and coordination
- » Cause difficulty thinking and problem solving
- » Cause some people to become paranoid (fearful and suspicious), worried or restless

Depending on how much is used and the method of use (e.g. smoking or eating) effects can be felt for up to 6 to 12 hours.

## HARM LATER IN LIFE

Regular cannabis use over the long term is associated with respiratory problems, heart disease and cancers.

If you have personal or family history of mental health issues or lung or heart conditions, you are at greater risk of harm. Avoiding use of cannabis is the safest way to look after yourself.

If you are using cannabis and want to reduce or stop using, talk to an Alcohol or Other Drug worker, GP, or counsellor who can provide support and steps to check out your general and mental health.

## HOW DOES CANNABIS HARM THE DEVELOPING BRAIN?

The active ingredient in cannabis binds to receptors in the brain. This can impact the important development the brain goes through between the ages of 14 to 24.

### MEMORY AND LEARNING

Cannabis reduces the ability to focus, pay attention, be organised and make decision. Less information gets saved as memories, which can make it harder to learn and remember new things.

### MENTAL HEALTH

Cannabis use can lead to prolonged low mood, anxiety and depression. Regular and heavy use increases the risk of developing mental health issues, including psychosis and dependence.

**The earlier you start using cannabis, and the more often you use it, the greater the risk of developing dependence and long-term problems with learning, memory, and mood.**

## DID YOU KNOW?

Young people who start using cannabis at an early age are more likely to:



Drop out of high school



Become dependent on cannabis



Use other drugs



Experience mental health issues, self-harm and suicide



# TIPS TO REDUCE YOUR RISK IF USING CANNABIS



## THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO REDUCE THE RISK OF HARM IS TO NOT USE CANNABIS.

If you do choose to use cannabis, it's important to know ways to reduce the risk of harm. It's best to delay using cannabis for as long as possible while the brain is still developing.

### TRY A SMALL AMOUNT FIRST

Always try a small amount first to see the effects before using more, as every product will be different.

### TAKE BREAKS FROM USING

Using cannabis more often and in large amounts, can affect your physical and mental health. Take breaks from using when you can.

### LOOK OUT FOR YOUR MATES

If your friend experiences unwanted effects, try to keep them calm. Never leave them alone and get help if necessary.

### TRY TO AVOID DEEP INHALES

Try to avoid deep inhales or holding your breath when smoking. You will still get the effects and can reduce some of the toxins in your lungs.

### AVOID ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUGS

Mixing alcohol and other drugs with cannabis can cause increased and unwanted effects. Try to use cannabis without other drugs or use less of each if you use together.

### DON'T USE CANNABIS AND DRIVE

Cannabis affects your driving ability, attention and reaction time. Don't drive for at least 6 hours (everyone is different so this can be many hours longer).

### USE LESS OR NO TOBACCO

Mixing tobacco with cannabis increases the risk of nicotine dependence and smoking related cancers. Try to reduce or not use tobacco in your mix.

### TRY TO USE LOWER THC

High THC can increase the risk of experiencing mental health issues and dependence. Try to use cannabis with lower THC and take breaks from using when you can.

### AVOID SYNTHETICS

Synthetic cannabinoids do not have the same effects as cannabis. They are strong psychoactive drugs which can cause health and mental health harms, including death.

**ALCOHOL AND DRUG SUPPORT LINE (24/7)  
METRO (08) 9442 5000 OR COUNTRY 1800 198 024**

A free 24-hour, state-wide confidential, non-judgemental telephone counselling, information and referral service for anyone seeking help for their own or another person's alcohol or drug use.

**DRUG AWARE**