

Cannabis

Cannabis is a hallucinogen and comes from a plant named *Cannabis sativa*. Its active ingredient is THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). It is mostly found in the leaves and flowers of the plant.

Street Names

"Marijuana", "pot", "bush", "weed", "hash", "ganja", "grass", "joint"

What it Looks Like

Commonly encountered as dried plant material (herbal cannabis and cannabis buds) or as resinous pellet (cannabis resin). Either can be mixed with tobacco in ordinary cigarettes or smoked. Herbal cannabis is also commonly placed in hand-rolled cigarettes, each of which is called a joint.

Effects and Dangers

When cannabis is smoked, the active ingredient (THC) rapidly enters the blood stream and is quickly carried to the brain. The effect is generally more intense and shorter than when cannabis is taken orally. After taking the drug, the gloomy depressed mood may be worsened rather than be removed.

After the first few puffs, people:

- become more relaxed and physically inactive
- become talkative, laugh easily and feel less inhibited
- Sometimes become more inward looking
- Experience changes
 - the perception of time goes slower
 - the perception of space, perspectives and distances becomes distorted
 - the senses become sharper
- have reduced concentration and impaired memory and judgement
- show reduced ability to process information or perform complicated activities like driving a car or using machinery
- show inability to balance, especially when standing
- have a more rapid heart rate, increased appetite, dryness of mouth and throat, reddening of the eyes and drowsiness

- feeling of confusion and anxiety

More severe symptoms sometimes arise with regular heavy use. These might be:

- depression and extreme suspicion of others
- nervousness, irritability and short temper
- bronchitis
- conjunctivitis
- endocrine disorder

Other Systems Affected

Immune System: While animal studies show that cannabis can affect the immune system, there is no evidence of this in human.

Brain: Concentration and memory are affected. It is not known if long-term use of cannabis damages the brain.

Hormones: Some research showed changes in sex hormones of otherwise healthy adults. In male heavy users of cannabis, lowered testosterone (male hormone) levels and sperm counts have been shown. For women, cannabis may interfere with the menstrual cycle.

Special Dangers

Some show removal of inhibitions and a freer expression of sexual urges on taking cannabis. Others show the reverse and lose interest in sex.

Those who regularly use cannabis are more likely to take alcohol and tobacco or try other illegal drugs.

Legal Aspects

Cannabis is a dangerous drug controlled under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance. It is an offence to illegally cultivate, manufacture, supply or possess cannabis.