

# Cannabis

Cannabis (marijuana, pot, weed, reefer, MJ, dope or grass) comes from the plant, *Cannabis sativa*. Once grown, the leaves and flowers can be dried for use or made into oils, waxes and other products for consumption. Cannabis can be smoked in a joint, pipe or bong, or vaporized. It can also be eaten, brewed as a tea or made into skin lotions.

Cannabis contains many chemical compounds. Two that receive a lot of attention are THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (cannabidiol). THC is what makes people “high”; CBD is often used to alleviate pain and does not result in a “high.”

## How it works

When you smoke cannabis, the drug passes through your lungs, heart, bloodstream and brain. The drug turns on receptors in your brain which gives the feeling of being high. When you eat cannabis, the drug passes through your digestive system, bloodstream and brain and it can take longer for you to feel the effects.

## Short-term Effects

Cannabis affects everyone differently. After using cannabis, you might have red eyes, problems with memory and increased hunger (also known as “the munchies”) or feel sleepy. You may also become paranoid and nervous. Cannabis can affect short-term memory and your ability to concentrate. It can also increase your heart rate and decrease blood pressure.

Cannabis use can slow down your reaction time and affect your attention span. If you use cannabis, do not operate motorized vehicles including cars, boats, off-road vehicles or snowmobiles – you could be charged for impaired driving.

## Long-term Effects

If cannabis is smoked regularly, it could cause problems with your immune system, lungs and airways.

Long-term effects may include coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath after exercise, chest tightness

and severe and reoccurring bronchitis.

Frequent cannabis use (use at least once a week over a period of months or years) can affect memory, attention, learning and problem solving. Heavy and regular use can also increase the risk of depression and anxiety.

## Cannabis and dependency

Research suggests that with cannabis use, you could become psychologically dependent (you feel you need it) or physically dependent (your body needs it) on the drug. Your risk of becoming dependent on cannabis increases if you use it daily.

## Youth and their developing brains

The teen years are a critical time for brain development. The brain is not fully developed until around age 25. Using cannabis can affect how the brain forms and grows which means the brain needs to work harder to respond in a given situation. Studies have shown that heavy cannabis use in adolescence can permanently alter brain chemistry, which could affect how youth learn, behave, respond and act.

## Women who are pregnant and/or breastfeeding

Using cannabis during pregnancy can affect the baby. There is no safe amount of cannabis to use during pregnancy or when breastfeeding. Heavy cannabis use during pregnancy can also lead to

lower birth weight of the baby. Cannabis is fat soluble which means that its chemicals are in breast milk and can be passed along to the baby during breastfeeding.

## Mental Health

Frequent cannabis use has been associated with an increased risk of suicide, depression and anxiety disorders. For some people, using cannabis can increase the risk of developing more severe mental health issues. People could be at increased risk if they start using cannabis at a young age, use cannabis frequently (daily or almost every day) or have a personal or family history of psychosis and/or schizophrenia.

## Addiction

Contrary to popular belief, people can become addicted to cannabis. Individuals who use cannabis can develop a cannabis use disorder. This can sometimes lead to physical dependence and addiction, especially with continued, frequent and heavy cannabis use. Addiction can develop at any age, but youth are especially vulnerable as their brains are still developing.

## Who can you contact for help regarding drug use?

Contact your local Addictions/Mental Health Services office, doctor or other health care provider if you need more information. To locate services near you:

- Visit [saskatchewan.ca/addictions](http://saskatchewan.ca/addictions).
- Call HealthLine at 811. Trained staff are available to provide mental health and addictions crisis support, in a safe and confidential manner.
- Visit HealthLine Online at [healthlineonline.ca](http://healthlineonline.ca).

**NOTE:** *This material is for information only and should not replace advice from an Addictions or Mental Health Counsellor, doctor or other health care provider.*

For fact sheet sources please contact Saskatchewan Ministry of Health at (306) 787-7239.

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