



WORKBOOK
AND SELF
HELP TOOLS

CANNABIS AND YOU

IS IT TIME
FOR A
CHANGE?



Cannabis and You: is it time for a change?

In 2008 the first version of Cannabis and You was printed. A lot has happened since then.

- Research has improved about cannabis' long term effects.
- Some states in America have relaxed the law on cannabis
- The law in the UK reclassified cannabis from a class C drug back to class B
- New Psychoactive Substances including synthetic cannabinoids have become available



Who is this booklet for?

- This booklet is for anyone concerned that their cannabis use is affecting them in a negative way. It will also give family members and friends information they may find helpful.
- It is not a replacement for professional help if you need it. Where to get help and support is in this booklet
- What is in this booklet will help you examine your own cannabis use.
- The exercises in this booklet can be used as self help (on your own) or with the support of someone to help you make changes that you decide.

**Small steps,
when put
together, help
get us to where
we want to be**



...any journey starts with the first step.

Picking up this booklet may be that first step for you. Reading it will be another. Putting work into the exercises will bring you further along that journey.

It is not saying change is easy or happens overnight.

What counts is that you decide on changes that are right for you and then you put in the effort to make those changes happen.

**Whatever goal
you choose,
this booklet is
to help you see
that change is
possible.**

**How you use
the information
on these pages
is entirely up to
you.**

**Whatever you
decide, we wish
you well in your
efforts.**

What is in this booklet?



Understanding

- Where cannabis fits into my life
- How much are you using?
- How people change

Where are you with your use of cannabis?

- Weighing it all up
- Is your cannabis use putting you at risk? A self administered questionnaire
- What does your score mean?
- Bringing your decision together

Decision time

- What do you want to do?

Looking after yourself

- If you do stop can you expect withdrawal?
- Relaxation
- Making your decision work
- Is one method of using safer than another?

Making changes

- Staying stopped
- Cutting Down

A personal action plan

- Moving forward

Help and support

A closer look at cannabis

- What is cannabis
- Types of cannabis
- How do you know what you are getting?
- How cannabis works in the brain and body
- The impact of cannabis
- Cannabis and mental health problems

p4

p9

p10

p12

p16

p25

p33

p39

It is easier to make a change when you know where you starting from

Where does cannabis use fit into your life?

Before anyone can change something like regular use of cannabis it is helpful to understand what it does for you. What need does it meet?

Does it help me cope?

Does it help me feel better about myself?

Does it help me fit in with my friends?

Look over the list below. What benefits do you see cannabis having for you?



- It is relaxing
 - I feel I have more fun
 - It helps when I feel lonely
 - It helps me forget my problems
 - I like the feel of getting high
 - It helps me be more confident
 - It helps me laugh and find things funny
 - It helps me face my responsibilities
 - It improves sex
 - I don't feel so nervous or stressed
 - Other: _____
- It helps me sleep
 - It eases pain
 - It stops me from thinking too much
 - It helps when I'm feeling down
 - It lifts me when I feel bored
 - It helps me be more creative
 - Other people expect me to smoke (especially at certain times: at recreational activities, weekend, etc.)
 - It's automatic. It is what I do
 - It's part of my life. I'm attached to it

How much are you using?

In the past few months, how much cannabis would you use over a typical week?
Write your use in the box below.

Day	Where	Who with & why?	What happened?	Cost

Was this more or less than you were using this time last year?

What was good about that week?

What was not so good?

How people change

It might help to have a closer look at how people change. People often go through five stages when changing anything like smoking, drinking or other drug use. A persons' next step will depend on what stage they are in. We move from being uninterested in change (precontemplation stage) to thinking about it (contemplation stage) to committing to make a change.



What are the 5 Stages?

- 1. Not thinking about change (Precontemplation)** Someone here is not really thinking about changing. They like what they are doing or don't see it as a problem.
- 2. Thinking about it but not quite ready to change (Contemplation)** Someone is considering change but not doing anything. They are aware of the consequences of what they are doing but are not sure or ambivalent about change.
- 3. Getting ready to change (Preparation)** Now they make a committed, determined decision and get a plan of "how" to do it.
- 4. Making change happen (Action)** In this stage, they work hard at keeping that decision going
- 5. Maintenance** Someone in the maintenance stage keeps the decision to change going.

Dealing with RELAPSE

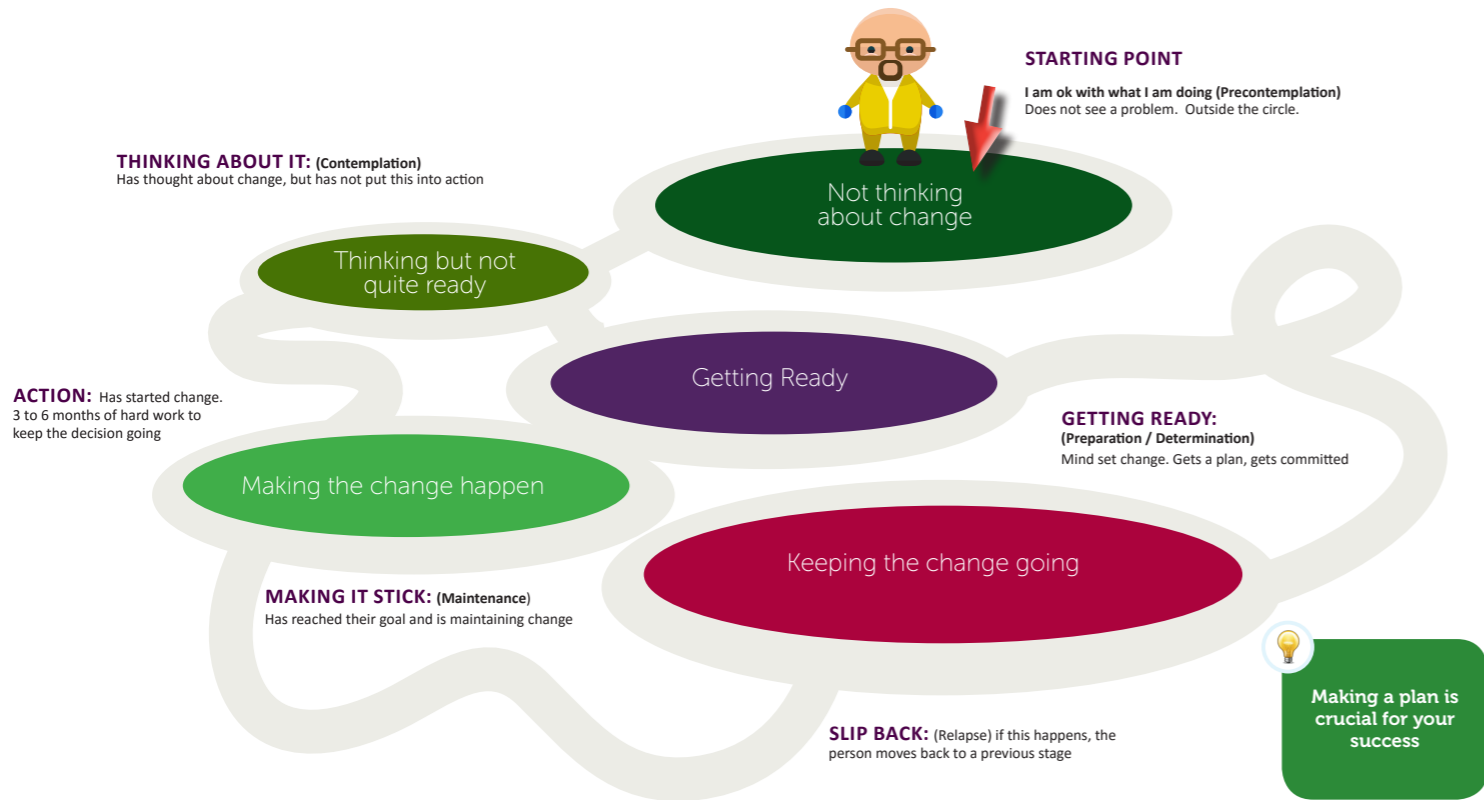
Along the way to changing, relapse is always a possibility. Although relapse can be discouraging, relapses can be an important opportunity to learn from and decide to try again.

The key is to look back over your efforts and develop a plan for the next time. People who relapse may need to learn how to anticipate high-risk situations more effectively (like being around people who use cannabis).

Does it help to know what stage you are? The people who developed the stages of change think so. On the next page, think through the stages, where you are and why.

(Source: Prochaska, JO and DiClemente, C 1982) For further reading have a look at Changing for Good by James Prochaska, James Norcross, and Carlo DiClemente (1994: Avon Books). It is a good resource for helping people change a range of things like smoking, drinking and other health issues.

Where are you in the Stages of Change?



Where do you think you are?

What makes you think this?

What is your next step?

What can you do to support change?

Where are you with your cannabis use?

.....

.....

Weighing it all up



Making a decision about something like your cannabis use requires stepping back and taking a good hard look at your use, what does it do for you and how it's affecting you. If it was all bad, you wouldn't be using it at all.

This will involve:

- What does it do for you?
- What problems is it causing?
- Why change? What will be better?

What does it do for you?

From page 3, what are the main things you get out of using cannabis?

Now go back over your list. Think about each benefit and be honest with yourself: does it still help me do this?

What problems would you like to avoid?

- | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Feeling anxious / stressed | <input type="radio"/> Depression | <input type="radio"/> Feeling as if I have no choice |
| <input type="radio"/> Conflict with people I care about | <input type="radio"/> Having problems remembering important things | <input type="radio"/> Difficulty keeping a job |
| <input type="radio"/> Mental confusion. I can't think clearly, or I can't make up my mind about things | <input type="radio"/> Destroying my ability to work well | <input type="radio"/> Not doing as well as I could at school or work |
| <input type="radio"/> Feeling bad about myself | <input type="radio"/> Messing up my sleep | <input type="radio"/> Losing self-esteem |
| <input type="radio"/> Feeling paranoid | <input type="radio"/> Irregular menstrual cycle | <input type="radio"/> Feeling like everything is hopeless |
| <input type="radio"/> Feeling lost. I feel I don't have any sense of spiritual connection with the world | <input type="radio"/> Legal problems | <input type="radio"/> Feeling irresponsible or immature |
| <input type="radio"/> Memory loss | <input type="radio"/> Financial worries: too much money spent | <input type="radio"/> Feeling lazy, no motivation |
| | <input type="radio"/> I am worried about my physical health | <input type="radio"/> Getting into trouble with the police |



Reasons for changing

- I'll stop feeling nervous and tense
- I'll be more productive
- I'll be able to show my good qualities more often
- I'll have more energy
- It will improve relationships at home
- I'll be able to think more clearly and my memory will improve
- I'll set a good example for my children (brothers or sisters)
- I'll have more money
- I will have less worries about my health
- I will work better
- I'll get control of my life
- I'll gain self-confidence
- I'll feel like I've finally started making smart decisions
- I'll regain my creativity
- I'll feel more relaxed

Continue your reasons for changing your cannabis use by rewriting the three most serious problems from the previous section.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Rank your reasons for changing in order of importance to you.

Write them here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Is your cannabis use putting you at risk?

Continue your reasons for changing your cannabis use by rewriting the three most serious problems from the previous section.

Are you unsure whether you should change your use of cannabis?

Could what you are using be putting you at risk in some way?

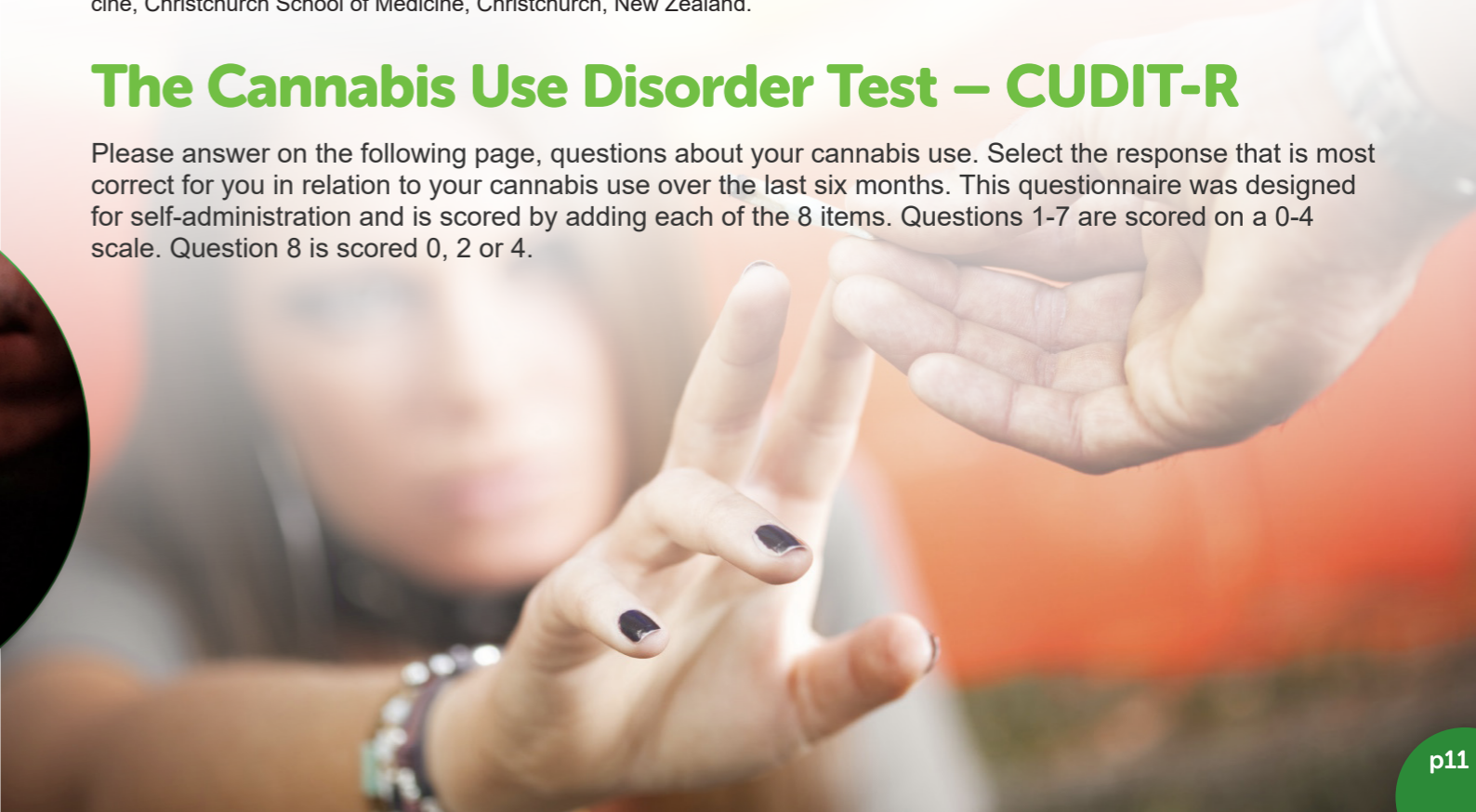
Here is a quick, easy and confidential way to find out.

The CUDIT questionnaire was developed by researchers in New Zealand to evaluate a person's use of cannabis.

Permission to use the Cannabis Use Disorders Identification Test given by Professor Simon Adamson Dept of Psychological Medicine, Christchurch School of Medicine, Christchurch, New Zealand.

The Cannabis Use Disorder Test – CUDIT-R

Please answer on the following page, questions about your cannabis use. Select the response that is most correct for you in relation to your cannabis use over the last six months. This questionnaire was designed for self-administration and is scored by adding each of the 8 items. Questions 1-7 are scored on a 0-4 scale. Question 8 is scored 0, 2 or 4.



1. How often do you use cannabis?

- Never (0 points)
- Monthly or less (1 point)
- 2-4 times a month (2 points)
- 2-3 times a week (3 points)
- 4 or more times a week (4 points)

2. How many hours were you “stoned” on a typical day when you were using cannabis?

- Less than 1 (0 points)
- 1 or 2 (1 point)
- 3 or 4 (2 points)
- 5 or 6 (3 points)
- 7 or more (4 points)

3. How often during the last 6 months did you find that you were not able to stop using cannabis once you had started?

- Never (0 points)
- Less than monthly (1 point)
- Monthly (2 points)
- Weekly (3 points)
- Daily or almost daily (4 points)

4. How often during the last 6 months did you fail to do what was normally expected from you because of using cannabis?

- Never (0 points)
- Less than monthly (1 point)
- Monthly (2 points)
- Weekly (3 points)
- Daily or almost daily (4 points)

5. How often in the past 6 months have you devoted a great deal of your time to getting, using or recovering from cannabis?

- Never (0 points)
- Less than monthly (1 point)
- Monthly (2 points)
- Weekly (3 points)
- Daily or almost daily (4 points)

6. How often during the last 6 months have you had a problem with your memory or concentration after using cannabis?

- Never (0 points)
- Less than monthly (1 point)
- Monthly (2 points)
- Weekly (3 points)
- Daily or almost daily (4 points)

7. How often do you use cannabis in situations that could be physically hazardous, such as driving, operating machinery, or caring for children?

- Never (0 points)
- Less than monthly (1 point)
- Monthly (2 points)
- Weekly (3 points)
- Daily or almost daily (4 points)

8. Have you ever thought about cutting down, or stopping, your use of cannabis?

- Never (0 points)
- Yes, but not in the past 6 months (2 points)
- Yes, during the past 6 months (4 points)

What does your score mean?

The CUDIT questionnaire has been well researched.

Your CUDIT score shows whether your use of cannabis should be considered a problem.

Higher scores typically reflect more serious problems.

Your total score is:

Whatever your results, if you feel uncomfortable about some of your answers regarding your cannabis use you may want to talk it over with someone.



Dependance

The word dependence is used above. In general, the symptoms of dependence are:

- Using more, or for longer, than you meant to
- A constant desire to use, or trying to give it up and failing
- Spending a lot of time getting supplies, using and recovering
- Spending less time on important activities or giving them up altogether
- Keeping on using, even when you know it's harming you
- Tolerance (needing more of the drug to get the same effect)
- Withdrawal (unpleasant symptoms when you stop)

Could you stop if you wanted to? People who are considering stopping their cannabis use often find it helpful to weigh up what is good and not so good before they make a plan to change.

Bringing your decision

When people make any decision, they often weigh up the pros and cons to help them make the decision that is right for them. This is particularly useful when someone is in the "thinking about change" stage (contemplation).

In the left column, write down some GOOD things about cannabis use. In the right column, write down all the BAD, unpleasant, or difficult things about your cannabis use. Next, give a score of importance to each item: 1 slightly important 2 moderately important 3 Very important 4 Extremely important.

**When you finish, think:
which way is the scale tipping?**

The good and the Bad...

Good (Pro)

Bad (Con)

Good things

Decisional Balance Worksheet

Not so good things

DECISIONS

Decision time

What do you want to do with your cannabis use: Stay the same, cut down, or quit?

The aim of the previous pages was for you to take a closer look at what your own cannabis use and what it's costing you.

The goal you set is entirely up to you.

Making a decision and making a commitment to work toward your goal is an important step.

But what are you going to do?

If you stay the same, that is your call.

Both quitting and cutting down takes effort. What might help you with that decision?

Quitting might be a better choice when;

Honesty tells me trying to control my use just won't work for me.

I have tried to cut down before and it just did not work.

The consequences of me continuing to use are just too much (health, relationships).

My mental health has been really affected.

I am worried I am dependent. I want to have more control in my life and cannabis is controlling me.

I have a family history of mental health problems.

I am in trouble with the law or have financial problems.

Cutting down might be a better choice when;

I know I am not going to quit.

Using will not interfere with my quality of life or well being.

The level of my use has benefits that outweigh the consequences.

My cannabis use does not interfere with my work, education, etc.

I can set a limit or say no at times.

I do not have a history of mental health problems in my family.

I know it is illegal and costly, but I am willing to take the risk.

Looking over what you have written, the best goal for you is to:

Cut down on my cannabis use To stop using cannabis completely

I will start on this day_____.

If cutting down, I will have _____ cannabis free days and not use more than_____ days.

I will read on to get ideas of what helps._____

Self rating readiness scales

Readiness scale:

Please rate your feelings about the possibility of changing our cannabis use.

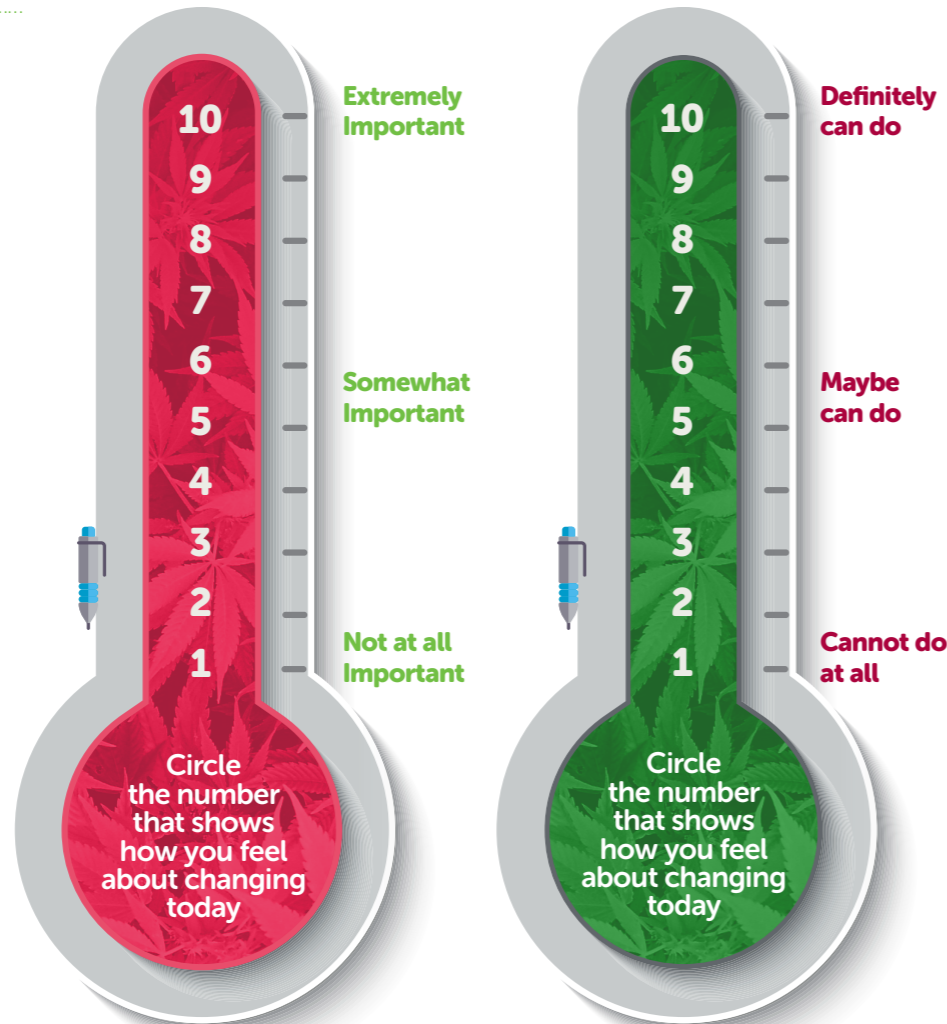
.....
.....

How important is changing

to me today?

How confident I am that I can change if I decide to?

.....
.....
.....



Looking after yourself

If you do stop, can you expect withdrawal?

If you have been using frequently and heavily, you may have become dependent.

Using cannabis on a regular basis can result in people feeling the need to continue using in spite of continued problems.

Studies from around the world would find that **8 - 10 %** of cannabis users would go on to develop a dependency.

Cannabis withdrawal

In the past, cannabis was seen as a drug that would not produce a withdrawal like alcohol or heroin. The evidence says that heavy cannabis users may experience unpleasant symptoms like when people stop smoking cigarettes.

These withdrawal symptoms can include:

- **Increased irritability**
- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **Difficulty sleeping**
- **Vivid and disturbing dreams**
- **Mood swings**
- **Headaches**
- **Tiredness**
- **Physical discomfort such as sweating or hot and cold flushes**

Are you experiencing any of these?

- **Look after yourself: get plenty of rest, eat well, exercise.**
- **Cut back on stimulants like coffee, tea, chocolate, sugar and cigarettes.**
- **If sleep is a problem: a warm bath or milk before bed can help.**
- **Herbal sleep remedies are also available. Just be careful you are not picking up new bad habits.**

You may have these symptoms. Not everyone, however, does. If you do and they seem extreme it may be a good idea to see your GP.



These symptoms do pass, usually in one or two weeks. The good news is there are things you can do which help.

Being able to relax is a skill that can be learned

Relaxation

Learning to relax and calm yourself in stressful times can be helpful when trying to change your cannabis use. Here are two calming exercises you may find useful.

Deep Breathing 7/11

A simple but powerful technique that is easy to learn. It has immediate beneficial effect.

From deep in the pit of the stomach breathe in for a quick 7 seconds and then breathe out for 11 seconds. Do this 5, 6, 7 times and see the reaction. Inhaling triggers one part of our nervous system which creates arousal and exhaling stimulates a relaxation response. By breathing out more than breathing in you trigger the relaxation response over the arousal response.

Clenched Fists

This is a simple technique from Yoga. It works on a simple principle. If you tense muscles and then relax them, they are always more relaxed after you have just tensed them.

First, make your hands into tight fists... as tight as possible. Notice the tension in the muscles of the fingers. Become aware of the hardness of your fingernails in the palm of your hands. Notice the skin stretched across the knuckles and how your wrists have become rigid.

In a moment... begin to relax your hands. When you do... really concentrate on the change between tension and relaxation. When you are really concentrating, relax those hands and fingers. The relaxed feeling is now going up your arms to your shoulders. In a few minutes it will spread to your whole body. You don't have to say anything or do anything. Let the relaxation flow.

What helps you relax?

(A Hot bath, exercise: walking, a film)

With any of the ways that help people relax, the important thing is when you find ways that work, keep using them. Why not try this:



The bottom line: If you find cutting down is not working for you, consider stopping all together. Help is available to help you do this.

(See the help and support section)

Making your decision work

Stopping or cutting down your cannabis use takes commitment and continuous effort.

Some people find making a change like this not as easy as they thought because:

- It's a habit you have got used to
- It's hard to say no when offered
- It's far too easy to get
- Don't know what else to do with your time or to have fun
- It is always on your mind

Knowing your high risk spots

People have more success changing when they have a plan. Knowing your high risk spots helps you prepare how you are going to deal with the pressure to turn back from the goal you set.



What would put you under more pressure?

	Almost never	Sometimes	Often
When I'm with other people who are drinking or using drugs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel tense	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I have to meet people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I think that just one would cause no harm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel depressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I'm not at work or school that day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel happy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I have money to spend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel frustrated with my life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel tired	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel disappointed that other people have let me down	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I remember the good times I was using	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other high risk times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My main high risk points are?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

Making changes

Staying stopped

Some people find they get stuck thinking about using or they experience cravings. A craving is when you have constant thoughts about the drug or feel agitated or unsettled.

Most urges to use are like waves. They build to a peak and then crash and are gone. If you wait a while, the wave will pass. Try imagining that you are a surfer riding the "wave" of craving until it goes away.

Cravings can be like a stray dog that keeps appearing at your back door. The more you feed it, the more likely it will come back.

This technique is consistent with a slogan in recovery, this Too shall pass'.

The good news is that over time cravings tend to get weaker and last for a shorter time. Here are some strategies that people have found helpful. Finding what works for you may take a bit of effort.

Think about the good things about not using:

Look back over the things you have identified in this booklet. It helps to pay attention to these positive things rather than focusing on what you seem to be giving up. Add more items to the list of benefits. You might also carry a card listing the benefits whenever you catch yourself under pressure to use.

Think about the bad side of using.

Make a list of unpleasant experiences associated with using. Try to think of an image of a specific thing that tells you, "I just don't want that." Make a list of the negatives of using on the reverse side of the card of the benefits of not using. At moments of temptation, take out the card and read it over slowly three or four times.

Distractions.

Think about something unrelated to using. Doing something you enjoy or you want to get done will get your mind off using.

Self-reinforcement.

Remind yourself of your success so far. Do you want to give that up?

Decision delay technique

Put off the decision to use for 15 minutes. The craving will probably pass.

Leave or change the situation

If it is putting you under too much pressure get up and leave.

Call someone

– Who in the past has been helpful? Keep in mind it is ok to ask for help.

If you do get cravings, notice when they start. Noticing them is the first step in dealing with them.

Are there certain situations which put you under more pressure?

Which of these would work for you?

Remember cravings are normal and they pass over time.



Cutting Down

Some people think cutting down is harder than stopping. Both goals take a lot of effort and determination.

If you intend to continue smoking, some methods and techniques may reduce the risks of your cannabis use.

An important thing to say is these ideas can help reduce the risk. All drug use carries some risk. The best way to make sure you are as risk free as possible is not use. The legal risks of using an illegal drug are still there as are many of the risks to your mental and physical health.

It is important to believe it is ok to ask for help

All drug use carries some risk. The only really safe thing to do is not use cannabis.

These are some tips that you might find useful to help you cut down your cannabis use:

1. **Set limits on the day, time, and amount you plan to use.**
2. **Plan ahead for particular situations. This can help you have a plan for dealing with pressure to use cannabis when you really don't want to.**
3. **To reduce the risk of overdoing it, try to space out the days between using cannabis.**
4. **Keep a diary of how much you are using. This helps you be aware when you are using more than you said you would.**
5. **The more you break up the pattern of use the easier it is to control cannabis and reduce the risks.**
6. **If you are trying to cut down, avoid things that remind you of cannabis. Certain places, people, events or times might make you think of cannabis and want to take it.**
7. **Try to identify all the things you associate with using cannabis and make an effort to avoid them until you feel OK about not smoking. Plan to do something else at the time of day you usually have a joint.**
8. **Spend time with people who will support your efforts to cut down or don't use.**
9. **Find alternatives to using cannabis.**
10. **Reward your self in other ways than smoking, for the success you have made.**

What else do you think might work for you?





If you have gotten this far in the booklet well done. Now, what are you going to do with all this?

Whatever you decide is up to you.

A personal action plan

If you have gotten this far in the booklet well done. Now, what are you going to do with all this?

Whatever you decide is up to you.

Setting Goals

Where I want to be with cannabis in the next 30 days:

Goal 1

Goal 2

The reasons this goal is important to me:



How do I plan to do this?

The steps I plan to take are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Once you stop using or are trying to cut down, you may be left with habits, routines and needs in your life which will require thought and planning in order to change.

A personal action plan is a way to promote physical, mental health as well as your goal with cannabis. While no single living plan works for everyone there are several guidelines which apply to most people. These include routine, moderation and flexibility.

Routine

Now is the time to ensure there is structure to your life by eating regular, regular bedtime and physical activity.

Developing regular, healthy eating habits is crucial not only for nutritional reasons, but it also stabilises mood, supplies energy and provides set periods when you can socialise and relax.

Moderation

Moderation in pacing change can be important. It means taking things in moderation and don't overdo it. Moderation also includes avoiding unnecessary stress.

"Easy does it" is sound advice. While you can't eliminate stress entirely, it helps to build coping skills and support.

Flexibility

Your action plan is not carved in stone. It is a set of options and needs that will change over time as you change. Try not to think of options as obligations that must be carried out precisely. Not fully meeting obligations is likely to just make you feel guilty. Guilt erodes your self-esteem which is precisely what your action plan is meant to build.

Dealing with high risk situations

Are there any situations that you can think of that could make it especially difficult for you: A time or a place or a feeling that might tempt you to go back to your old behaviour?

For example: on a Sunday night I get really stressed thinking about work on Monday and really want cannabis.

Make a list of your difficult situations:

-
-
-

Now make some plans for how to avoid these situations or make them more manageable. For each difficult situation, think of something you could do that would lower the chance of it interfering with your plans.

For example, if on a Sunday night I'm feeling stressed, then I will have a nice long bath and listen to some relaxing music instead of smoking.

Fill in the table in the next page with your difficult situations, and for each one, make an 'if-then' plan for coping with it.

Difficult situations	How I will avoid or cope with them



Dealing with setbacks

If you slip back from your goal, don't be too hard on yourself. Work out where things went wrong and what you could change next time. You might think of some new ideas that can help you keep on track.

Difficult situations and triggers

Are there certain times, places, or people in whose company you feel the temptation to fall back to your old behaviour?

It might help you to look back at those high-risk situations you identified on the previous page.

Have any of the situations changed?

Are there more now?



Support – are you getting enough?

- Are you getting enough support from your friends, family and your community? If the answer is no, think about the following questions:
- Are there certain people who are good at helping me make the changes I want? If yes, can I spend more time with them/ speak to them more often?
- How can the community help?
- Do you have any local support groups that you can go to?
- Are there things in my community I can get involved with?

Who is there to help me?

List some of the people who would support you with your goal.

-
-
-
-
-
-

Am I being realistic?

If you expected the results of changing to be too high, when the real results didn't match your expectations, you may have become disappointed and decided that all the effort of changing wasn't really worth it.

Having realistic expectations of what a change with your cannabis use will do for you means that you will be much more satisfied with the results.

And remember, one step at a time! Being realistic

= more satisfaction

= more likely to keep up new behaviour.



Rewards

Giving yourself little treats or a reward when you've made progress towards your goal can encourage you to keep going and make more progress.

You don't have to wait until you've achieved your goal to reward yourself

– remember that a big goal can be broken down into smaller mini-goals.

Reward yourself for any mini-goals you reach, and any **other small successes that you have along the way.**

Rewards don't have to cost money, but you can also 'save up' for rewards.

For example:

Put the money aside you were spending on cannabis then at the end of the week or the month spend the money on a reward for yourself.

Try and choose healthy rewards.

If you can't think of many rewards, here are some examples:

FREE



Rewards that don't cost money

- Having a nice relaxing bath
- Borrowing a book or magazine
- Inviting friends round
- Having some 'me' time when you can do whatever you want to
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk
- Doing some gardening
- Asking friends or family to look after your children so you can have some time for yourself
- Asking friends or family to notice and praise progress

Rewards that cost money

- Buying yourself a music album or new clothes
- Going to the cinema
- Buying yourself flowers
- Buying yourself sports equipment
- Going to a football match
- Going out for a meal
- Download a film
- Booking a holiday or weekend break

Help and support?

Who is out there that can help me do this?

Each of the five Health Trust areas has two levels of services:

The Community Addiction Teams

A step 2 service

If your family has been affected by your drug use the Step 2 services also provide support for family members.

For a directory of services of where these services are and how to contact them:

Visit: www.drugsandalcoholni.info

There are also a range of community mental health services at a treatment, early intervention and prevention level.

Visit: www.familysupportni.gov.uk

Each of the Five Health Trusts also has their Recovery College: A range of courses and workshops covering a range of topics you may find helpful.



A closer look at cannabis

Some people who have used this booklet have told us that some information on cannabis would be useful.

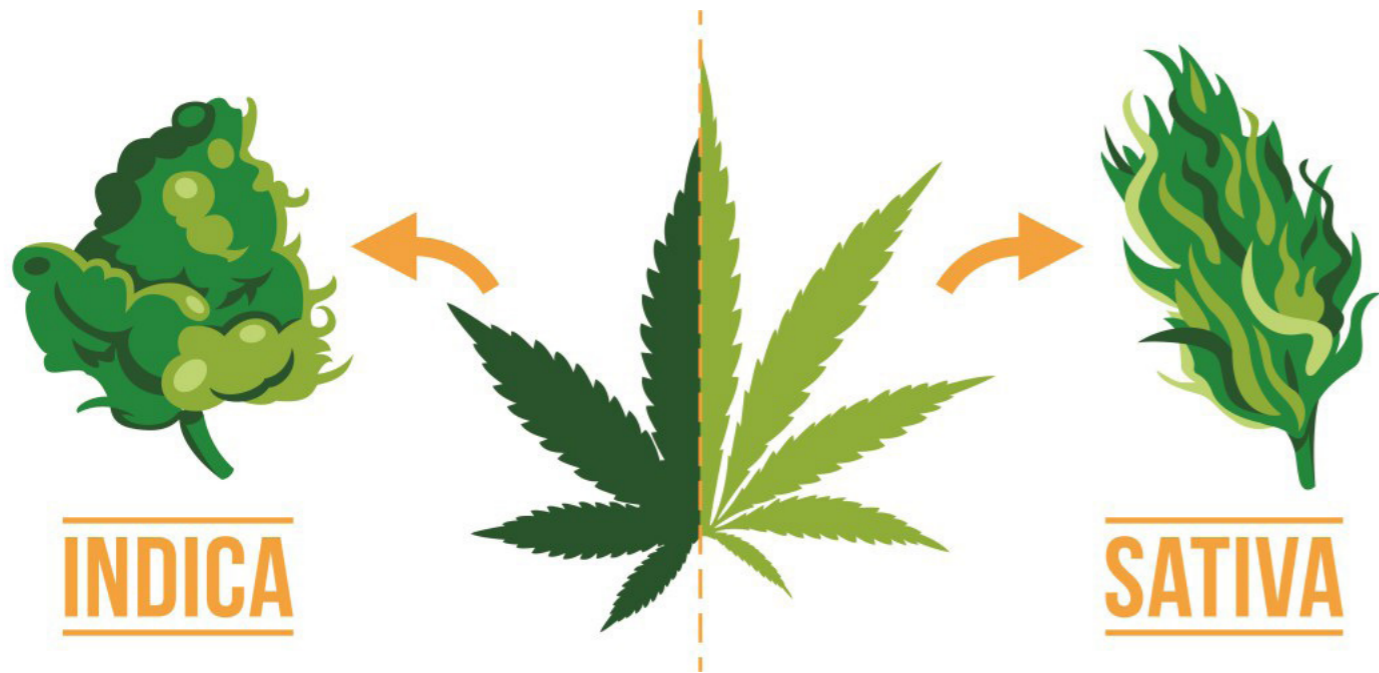
This information is not going to get into the debate that compares cannabis with other drugs and which is more dangerous. It will also not discuss any medical usefulness of cannabis.

The legal classification is another issue that will continue to confuse people.

What you don't need to be is an expert in cannabis in making any decision about your own cannabis use you need clear information which can help you make up your mind.

Whether it is a class B or C drug, it is still illegal! The bottom line is possession of cannabis is still an offence you can be arrested for.





What is cannabis?

Cannabis is from the hemp family. Hemp has been used for industrial purposes for centuries. Rope, fabric, paper, clothing all can come from hemp. Hemp seeds are high in protein that has a nutritional and industrial value. Hemp used for these purposes has very little of the chemicals that produce mind altering effects.

There are two main strains of cannabis that grows naturally. There are also other strains of the cannabis plant that grow in different parts of the world.

Cannabis Sativa is a tall plant with slimmer and pointy leaves.

Cannabis Indica is a shorter, stockier plant with broader leaves.

What is in cannabis?

There are around 400 chemicals in the cannabis plant. Many of these chemicals exist nowhere else other than in cannabis. It's the chemicals known as cannabinoids that give the plants its mind altering effects. There are at least 66 different cannabinoids.

The main cannabinoids in cannabis are:

- THC (Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) is the more commonly known.
- CBD (Cannabidiol).
- Both are in all cannabis plants to a degree.
- Cannabis Sativa generally has more THC, while Cannabis Indica has more CBD.
- CBD alone does not seem to be intoxicating, but it appears to modify the euphoric effect of THC and adds a sedative quality.

Types of cannabis

Cannabis comes in three forms:

Herbal Cannabis

Herbal cannabis is grown outdoors or indoors often with artificial lights and nutrients or hydroponically. Hydroponics is growing a plant indoors in water.

Its leaves and flowers are cultivated and dried. The leaves have less THC, typically 0.5% - 4%. The flowering heads have 3-4 times this concentration. Premium prices are paid for intact flowering buds.

THC contents are increased by preventing pollination of female plants by male plants leading to the development of extensive flowering tops.

Commercial seed developers have developed a number of varieties of plant such as "Skunk", and "Northern Lights" suited for indoor growth. The cannabinoids level of these plants varies.

One striking development is the potency of Skunk (up to 80% of the market), now averaging 16% THC much higher than the average THC in the herbal cannabis of the 60s and 70s. Old cannabis contained an anti-psychotic CBD (cannabidiol) but it is virtually absent in skunk, further increasing the potency and fuelling the increase in psychiatric problems. Brain scans have shown reduced volume in some areas from use of skunk as compared to the milder strains.

Cannabis resin

Different names for the type of cannabis resin usually come from what country it is from. Lebanon, Nepal, Afghanistan are some of the sources of cannabis resin.

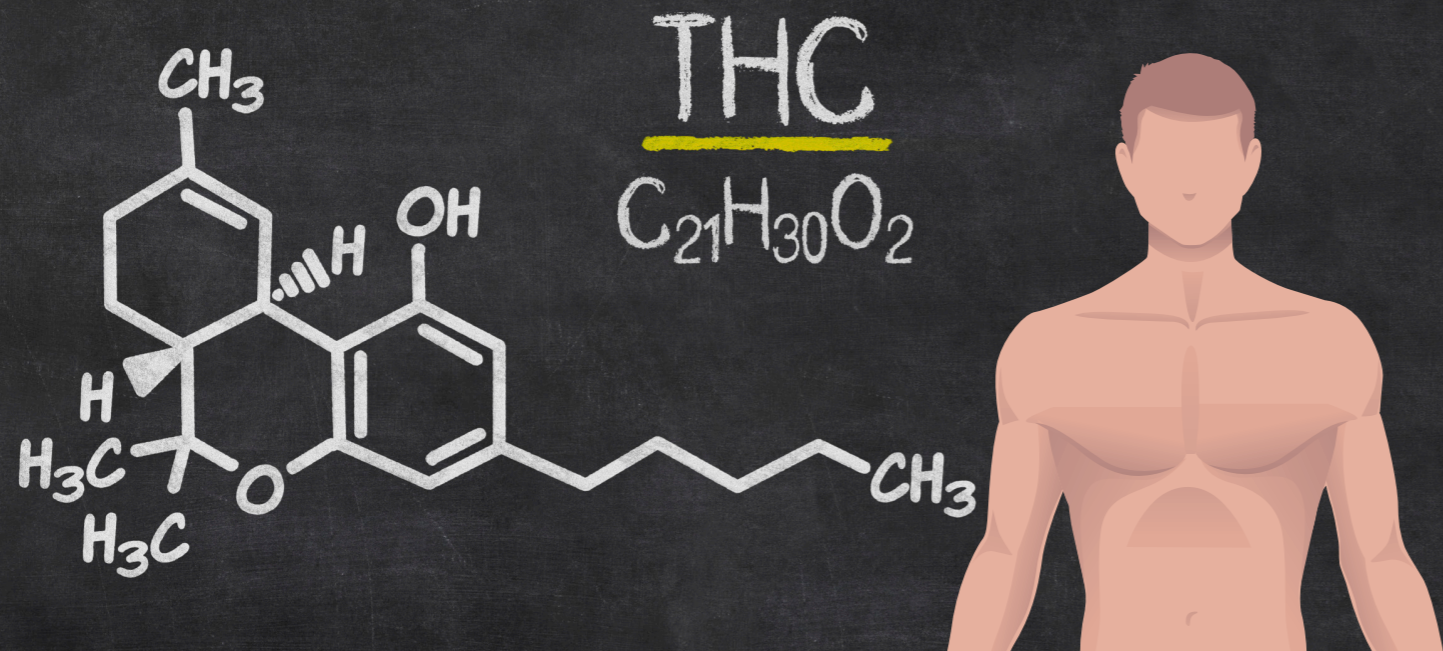
Resin is made by separating the sticky resin from the buds and leaves, drying it and moulding it into blocks. Different countries have different methods for doing this. Whatever the method, it leaves the potential for other material to be added to increase profits.



Cannabis Oil

Cannabis oil is dark liquid made by separating the resins from the plant material. It contains a high level of THC. It is rarely found in Northern Ireland.





How cannabis works in the brain and body

When cannabis is smoked, it is absorbed through the lungs and into the bloodstream. It is detected in the blood within one or two minutes of inhaling. It is then distributed throughout the body reaching the brain and also concentrated in the body's fat stores. Cannabis can still be detected days, even weeks after use as it is stored in fat cells. The THC connects to specific cannabinoids receptors in the brain and influences how those nerve cells work. The cannabinoids receptors are found in parts of the brain which control:

- Movement**
- Pleasure**
- Memory**
- Stress response**
- Thought**
- Concentration**
- Sensory and time perception**

If you have used cannabis, you know the range of different effects at different times.

Some of these can seem contradictory; relaxed, calm, anxious, restless, quiet, talkative, giggly, subdued, sleepy, animated, and distorted perception. The effects of different drugs are caused by the release of chemicals called neurotransmitters. While most drugs affect 1- 3 neurotransmitters, cannabis affects at least half a dozen, including serotonin, dopamine and endorphins. This explains why cannabis has such a wide range of effects on the mind: trippy, stimulating, pain killing, relaxing, etc.

At low and moderate levels of THC, the user may experience enhanced appreciation of sound, colour and tactile stimulation. At higher levels mild hallucinations can happen.

There are also a range of side effects: dryness of the mouth, reddening of the eyes, cough, husky voice, intense desire to eat. Users can also have a range of less pleasant effects: anxiety, paranoia, dizziness, nausea, disorientation. "Whities", while unpleasant are not usually dangerous.

The effects of different drugs are caused by the release of chemicals called neurotransmitters. While most drugs affect 1- 3 neurotransmitters, cannabis affects at least half a dozen



What impacts on the drug effect for the user?

The effects of taking cannabis can be highly variable and subjective. It can be influenced by:

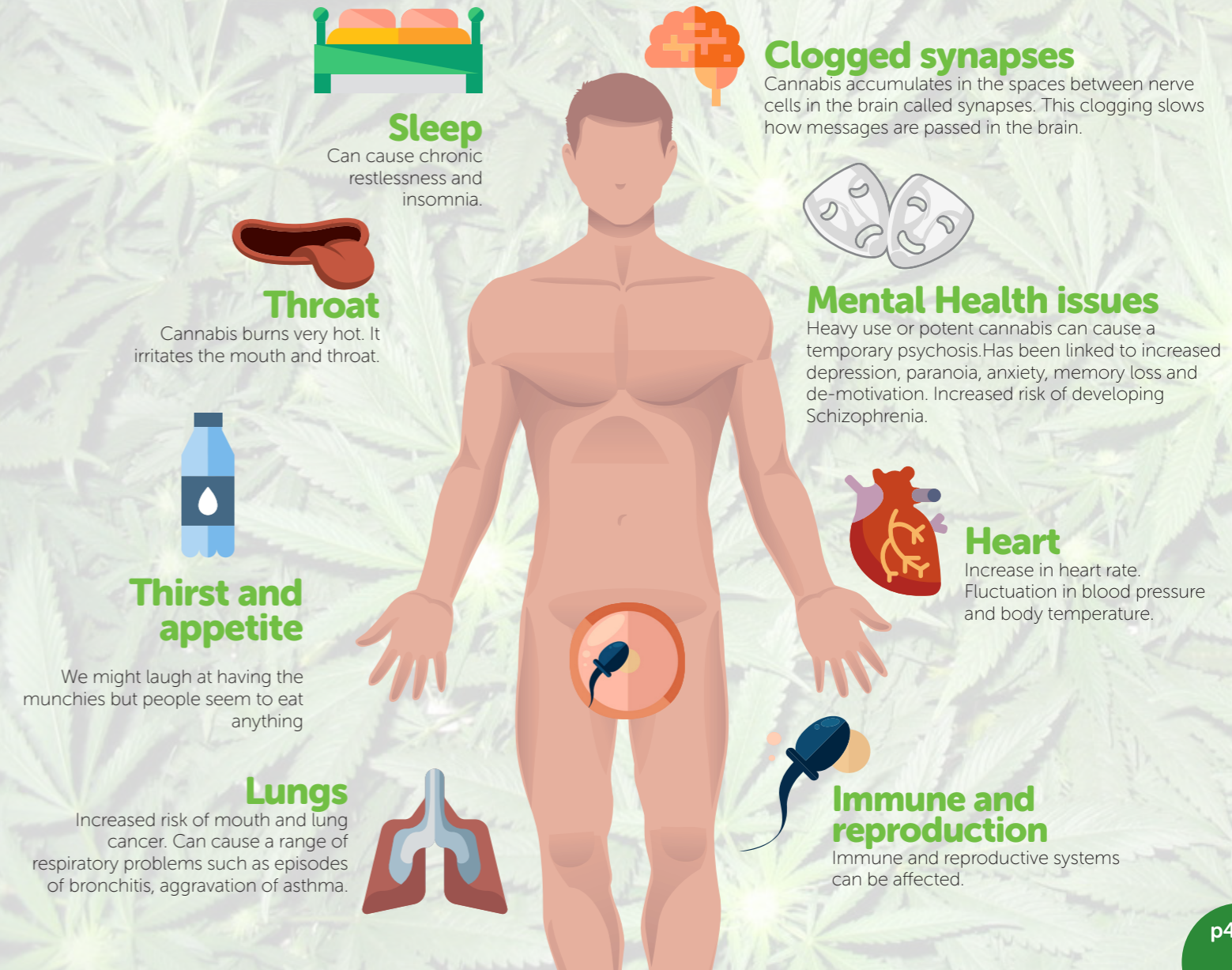
- Amount taken
- Strength and type of the cannabis
- Method of use (smoked or eaten)
- Mental state of the user
- Other substances used, like alcohol
- The setting of use
- The expectations and experience of the user

The strength of cannabis will change under certain circumstances.

For example, cannabis does not stay fresh and exposure to air reduces the THC level. As THC breaks down (a process known as oxidization) the THC is replaced by CBN (Cannabinol) which leaves the user feeling more messed up than stoned. This can also happen when processing the herbal cannabis to resin.

The impact of cannabis misuse

People can have very different reactions to cannabis use. How much effect cannabis has on anyone can depend on how much you've used, how often, how long you've been using and pre-existing medical or psychiatric conditions. This is by no means an exhausted list as research continues to build on what we know of its impact on people.



The relationship between cannabis use and mental health problems

You expect that the use of cannabis will give you a pleasant short term effect. Users can get a reaction they are not expecting.

Even one off use of cannabis can cause a sense of panic and increased anxiety. Experts are closely examining if cannabis increases the risk of serious mental health difficulties.

What is known so far:

- Does it cause schizophrenia? Available evidence suggests that people who use cannabis in their teens have an increased risk of developing schizophrenia when compared to non cannabis users.
- Cannabis (THC) increases the amount of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the brain. When psychotic or suffering from schizophrenia people have an excess of dopamine. Cannabis users double the chances of developing this condition. Schizophrenia is a chronic, often lifetime condition. It was reported (Murray et al, 2015) that users of skunk increase their risk of psychotic disorder three-fold compared to those who have never used, daily skunk users – five-fold.
- Some people with mental illness use cannabis to relieve their symptoms. It can actually make the condition worse and more difficult to manage.
- People who use cannabis are also more likely than others to experience episodes of depression.
- After a session of heavy cannabis use, people can experience a short term psychotic episode that can last from several hours to two or three days. In these episodes there is a loss of contact with reality, disordered thought, paranoia and sometimes hallucinations. Such an episode is caused by the direct effects of cannabis on the brain.
- In the last few years, brain scans have found brain damage in cannabis users patricianly using skunk. The volume of gray matter (brain cell bodies) has been reduced in some areas rich in cannabis receptors. These include the hippocampus (learning), amygdala (emotions), anterior cingulated (motivation) and prefrontal cortex (intelligence, problem solving and decision-making).

Having a family history of mental illness increases the likelihood of experiencing negative mental health effects when cannabis is used regularly.

Is there a history of mental health problems somewhere in your family?

A word of caution:

How do you know what you are getting?

There are no labels you can read are there? When sold commercially as in the coffee shops in the Netherlands, you can choose off a menu.

When bought off the streets in Northern Ireland it is often pot luck. In the vast majority of cases, you will have no idea what you are buying



	SATIVA Durban Poison \$45/8th - \$55/5g This pure sativa originates from the South African port city of Durban. It has gained notoriety worldwide for its sweet...	20	45	85	150	260
	HYBRID Pineapple Express \$45/8th - \$55/5G Pineapple Express was bred by G13 labs and is the child of Trainwreck and Hawaiian. The smell has been likened to the...	20	45	80	150	300
	SATIVA Lemon Haze \$45/8th - \$55/5G Lemon Haze Top 10 Sativa	15	45	70	130	240
	HYBRID AK-47 \$45/8th - \$55/5g Don't let its intense name fool you. AK-47 will leave you relaxed and mellow. This sativa-dominant hybrid delivers a...	20	45	80	150	260
	SATIVA Jolly Rancher Candy Sativa \$40/8th - \$50/5G The sweet taste has a presence of Jolly Rancher...	15	40	65	100	160
	HYBRID Sour Diesel \$45/8th - \$55/5G Sour Diesel Top 10 Hybrid	15	40	70	130	230
	HYBRID Train Wreck \$40/8th - \$50/5g Train Wreck Top 10 Strains	15	40	75	140	240
	CONCENTRATE After Death 45% THC \$20/G This is Nuggs soaked in CO2 Extract, and covered in kief. Very potent, and very flavorful for a unique...	10	20			
	CONCENTRATE ANTIMATTER 59% THC \$75/8th This is EXCLUSIVE product to our delivery. Comes straight from the growing facility. Its fresh flower cannabinoids, here...	25				

FRESH BUDS			
THAI	*****	5.00/g	
BIG WEED	*****	6.00/g	
POLM	*****	6.50/g	
SNEELOWITJE	*****	7.50/g	
SUPER POLM	*****	7.50/g	
WHITE WIDOW	*****	8.00/g	
WHITE CRYSTAL	*****	8.00/g	
BUBBLEGUM	*****	8.00/g	
DYNAMITE	*****	8.50/g	
SUPER MARIJUANA	*****	9.00/g	
AMNEZIA HAZE	*****	9.00/g	
HAZE	*****	10.00/g	
TOP LOTUS	*****	21.00/g	

WEED			
	1 GRAM	2 GRAM	5 GRAM
White Widow	40/60	€8	€16 €40
Santamaria	100%	€8	€16 €40
Purple Haze	100%	€10	€20 €50
CHOCO SID	50/50	€10	€20 €50
Jack HERRER	60/40	€11	€20 €50
BUBBLEGUM	60/40	€11	€20 €50
Amnesia G13	60/40	€12.50	€22.50 €55
CHEESE BID	35/65	€12.50	€22.50 €55
Coosy Jonge	80/20	€12.50	€22.50 €55
Super Zilver Haze	50/50	€13.50	€25 €60
SuperSkunk	20/80	€13.50	€25 €60
Rebel Haze	100%	€13.50	€25 €60
Strawberry Haze	100%	€15	€27.50 €60
APPLE HAZE	100%	€15	€27.50 €60
Bubble Kush	40/60	€15	€27.50 €60
Magic KUSH	20/80	€15	€27.50 €60
OG KUSH	30/70	€18.50	€35 €75

COFFEESHOP HASH			
	1 GRAM	2 GRAM	5 GRAM
AFGHAN	€8	€16	€35
SUPER MAROC	€8	€16	€35
Carmello SuperSkunk	€10	€20	€50
Zero Zero 1st	€10	€20	€50
Arabica Special	€11	€20	€50
Primera Superskunk	€15	€25	€60
NEPAL THE BEST	€16.90	€30	€65

SPECIAL			
	1 GRAM	2 GRAM	5 GRAM
Champagne hash	€20	€40	€75
SKUFF 100% PURE	€20	€40	€75
ICE THE BEST	€30	-----	-----

What we know

(not an exhausted list by any means)

- High strength weed is more dangerous to your mental health.
- Some resins have things added such as bees wax, boot polish, animal excrement, turpentine, ground coffee, milk powder, pine resin, barbiturates, ketamine, aspirin, glues and dyes.
- Damp can cause mould on cannabis, which can be dangerous to the user, when it is smoked or eaten. Fertilisers, pesticides and hormones which are used to increase yield can cause headaches and other side effects.
- Grit weed, where fibre-glass balls are sprayed onto herbal cannabis to increase its weight, can cause serious damage to the users' lungs. It is really hard to detect, but if you rub the bud with a wet finger then put that finger into your mouth you may feel the glass balls grind in your teeth.
- Synthetic cannabinoids may be sprayed onto weed with low natural THC to create the impression that it is more potent. Synthetic cannabinoids seem to cause more mental health problems than natural THC.
- If you are HIV+ or have cancer there may be a risk from fungi or bacteria in cannabis. The best way to combat this is to place your cannabis in an oven heated to 66-93° C for about 10 minutes to kill the fungi or bacteria.

Is one method of using safer than another?

Researchers have looked at ways of using that reduce the harm for cannabis smokers. Any smoking is harmful to the lungs, throat and heart. How you decide to take cannabis can have an influence on how much harm you do to these areas of the body. While debates do go on as to which is more harmful, any effort to reduce the harm is worth considering if you decide to keep using.

Inhaling: Avoid holding smoke in your lungs. You won't get more stoned but you will increase the amount of toxins in your lungs. Most of the THC is absorbed in seconds so holding the smoke in only increases the absorption of nasty chemicals into your lungs.

Seeds and stems: Throw away the seeds and stems when smoking herbal cannabis as they contain little to no THC and can be harsh on the throat.

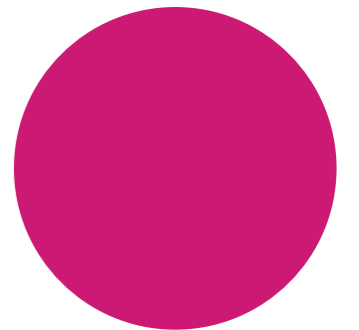
Use of tobacco: Avoid mixing cannabis with tobacco. Tobacco is addictive and exposes you to more tar and other carcinogens. The lungs are just not made to take in all that hot, toxic smoke. Smokers who mix their cannabis with tobacco find they are smoking more than they intend to because of the addiction to nicotine. There is a campaign by some people behind harm reduction to encourage people to find other ways and avoid the use of tobacco.


Important things that need to be said:

Never use cannabis and drive. You may think you are capable, but it lowers your reaction times and puts you and others at serious risk.

Avoid mixing drugs including alcohol. It makes things more unpredictable.

Using any drug while pregnant can harm the unborn baby





Synthetic cannabinoids and cannabis are very different drugs

Bongs: A bong or water pipe is seen as less harmful because the water inside the bong cools cannabis which burns very hot. The water in the bong also removes some of the heavy tar elements. Do not use plastic bottles, rubber hose or plastic stems, or aluminium as these give off harmful fumes when hot.

Pipes: If you use a pipe choose one made of glass or stainless steel or brass - wooden and plastic pipes can give off noxious fumes.

Filters: If you are using a piece of cardboard as a 'tip' or 'roach' use unprinted card as the print emits toxic fumes.

Vaporizers: Using a vaporizer to use cannabis stops you taking in smoke. There are some who believe this is the least harmful way of using cannabis.

Eating Cannabis: Eating Cannabis may reduce some risk but increase others. Some people eat cannabis by mixing it with food, or adding it to drinks. The thinking behind this is that it reduces damage to the lungs through smoking. There is a down side though. The effects from eating cannabis last longer. When cannabis is eaten it can take an hour or two to feel the effects, so avoid eating more in one session. Avoid using stronger cannabis if you are not used to it. Start with smaller test amounts since a gram can be like a mushroom or LSD trip and leave you high longer than you anticipated. Cannabis bought on the street may also have chemicals in it that just are not good for you. NEVER eat cannabis without cooking it.

Synthetic cannabinoids and cannabis are very different drugs

Synthetic cannabinoids are included in a group of drugs called "new psychoactive substances" (NPS). NPS are unregulated psychoactive (mind-altering) substances that have become available on the market and are intended to copy the effects

of illegal drugs. These were previously known as "legal Highs".



The term synthetic does not apply to the plant but rather to the chemical that the plant contains. The term synthetic cannabinoid is more appropriate.

The law change in 2016 when any drug that mimics an illegal drug became illegal. There is controversy about calling drugs like Spice and K2 synthetic cannabis. "Synthetic marijuana" is just not accurate according to experts.

The term synthetic does not apply to the plant but rather to the chemical that the plant contains (tetrahydrocannabinol). The term synthetic cannabinoid is more appropriate.

They are really quite different, and the effects are much more unpredictable.

It's dangerous, and there is no quality control in what you are getting.

Research on the safety of synthetic cannabinoids is now becoming available.

Synthetic cannabinoid intoxication is associated with acute psychosis

It may trigger a chronic (long-term) psychotic disorder among vulnerable individuals such as those with a family history of mental illness.



It is stated to be more toxic to the brain and more addictive than regular cannabis.

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) has issued an alert on 36 serious adverse events (13 deaths and 23 non-fatal intoxications) across Europe associated with the synthetic cannabinoid MDMB-CHMICA. These occurred between September 2014 and July 2015.

While you could use what is in this booklet to help you change your use of Synthetic cannabinoids there are things in the booklet that won't work. The CUDIT is for cannabis and not for Synthetic cannabinoids.

The bottom line: be careful with these drugs.

They cause people a lot of problems.



Written by Ed Sipler: Health Development Specialist in Alcohol, Drugs and Behaviour Change, South Eastern Health Care Trust with support from; ©reserve

CANNABIS AND YOU



Take it further online.
Free self help tools and resources.
www.drugsandalcoholni.info



 South Eastern Health
and Social Care Trust

The reproduction of this
booklet was funded by:



LOTTERY FUNDED

The Partnership is funded by The Big
Lottery Fund's Programme.

Additional copies
funded by:



Project supported by the PHA


**TAKING THE
INITIATIVE**
TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF ALCOHOL