

# Cannabis

## Slang terms

Some of the other terms for cannabis are grass, marijuana, pot, dope, hash, mull and green. Other common terms include ganja, Indian hemp, hat, locoweed and Mary. There are many other slang terms.

## What is Cannabis?

Cannabis is a mind and mood-altering drug, depressing the central nervous system. It is made from the Cannabis Sativa or hemp plant and is used in three forms:

- The plant - dried and crumbled. Leaves/buds resemble oregano or tea.
- Hashish or 'hash' - a concentrated form of marijuana made by compressing marijuana resins into small blocks.
- Hashish oil - a concentrated liquid extract from the plant.

## Some basic facts

This complex drug contains about 426 known chemicals that are changed into at least 2,000 chemicals when smoked. It is usually smoked in hand rolled cigarettes (joints) or smoked in water pipes (bongs).

The active ingredient in cannabis is the chemical Delta-9 Tetrahydrocannabinol known as THC. Most of the tissues and organs in the body absorb THC. However, it is most readily absorbed and stored by fatty tissues such as the brain, testes and ovaries. It is detectable by urine tests.

Although the obvious effects of cannabis last for only a few hours, the chemical traces of the THC stay in the body for a month or more.

Hashish is often stronger than the dried cannabis leaves and hashish oil is even more concentrated and, therefore, more potent.

**In 2007, one in three (33.5%, about 5.8 million) of Australians aged 14 years or older had used marijuana/cannabis at some time in their lives (Table 3.17).**

**Of the same Australians, almost one in ten (9.1%, 1.6 million) had used marijuana/cannabis in the previous 12 months.**

## Immediate effects

Cannabis affects people in different ways. An amount may affect one person slightly but have a much greater effect on another person.

The most common reaction to cannabis is to feel 'stoned', 'happy', 'bent', 'relaxed' or 'high'. Other effects vary, but can include:

- Increased appetite • Paranoia • Vomiting • Hallucinations • Confusion • Reddened eyes •  
• Loss of inhibitions • Anxiety • Panic • Loss of coordination • Loss of concentration •

## Long-term effects

If cannabis is used regularly, for long periods of time, there can be more serious effects. These include:

- Higher risk of lung cancer, bronchitis and other respiratory diseases
- Decrease in motivation
- Lower concentration, memory and learning abilities
- Reduced sex drive
- Lowered sperm count
- Irregular menstrual cycles
- Risk of psychotic behaviour - this is more likely if the person already has schizophrenia.

## Cannabis...

### The law

In Australia, it is illegal to grow, harvest, use, possess or sell cannabis or possess implements to use the drug. Laws regarding cannabis possession and use vary from state to state.

Convictions can affect study, work, travel and relationships.

### Driving

Driving under the influence of any drug is illegal in Australia. A person's reaction time, coordination, judgement and vision are affected by the use of cannabis. Combining cannabis with the use of alcohol increases the risk of having an accident.

In most jurisdictions in Australia, legislation has been passed or drafted that allows for random testing for drug driving. Victoria was the first state to introduce random drug driving legislation. Random road-side testing began at the end of 2004. South Australia followed suit in 2005, followed by Tasmania in 2006. New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland began testing in 2007 and the Northern Territory in 2008. Drivers should know the law for the state they are driving in, this is particularly important for drivers on holiday or working interstate.

### Health

Research indicates that, if used during pregnancy, the chemicals in cannabis may have an effect on the developing baby. There are reports of miscarriages, stillbirths, premature babies and low birth weights due to cannabis use. The THC in cannabis is passed on to new born babies through a mother's milk.

### People at greater risk

There are some people, who medical researchers think, should be extra careful when thinking about using cannabis. These include:

- Teenagers, as their hormonal systems are still developing.
- Epileptics who can suffer from fits after using cannabis.
- Women who are pregnant or want to get pregnant.
- People with a family history of schizophrenia or other mental illnesses.

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