

# CANNABIS

## BOTANICAL CLASSIFICATION

Family: Cannabaceae

Genus: Cannabis

Species: Sativa; Indica; ruderalis

## COMMON & BRAND NAMES:

Marijuana, Marihuana, pot, weed, grass, mary jane, dope,

The Substance, cannabis, pot, oobie, bud, ganja, hash, hashish, bhang

## EFFECTS CLASSIFICATION

Intoxicant; Stimulant;

Psychedelic; Depressant

## DESCRIPTION

Cannabis, a fast-growing bushy annual with dense sticky flowers, produces the psychoactive THC. It is the most widely used illegal psychoactive and has a long history of medicinal, recreational, and industrial use. The fibrous stalks of the plant are used to produce clothing and rope.

## DESCRIPTION

Cannabis is a leafy plant which grows wild in many of the tropic and temperate areas of the world. It is cultivated both indoors and out for the production of its flowering tops. The most commonly used form of cannabis are the leaves and flowering tops (buds) which may be either smoked or eaten; It also comes in a more concentrated resinous form called hashish, and as a sticky black liquid called hash oil. There are three distinct species of cannabis: cannabis sativa, cannabis indica, and cannabis ruderalis, though there is some argument as to whether these should be considered varieties rather than species. Most recreationally used cannabis is the result of interbreeding between these three types. The term 'hemp' is generally used to describe low-thc varieties of cannabis which are grown for industrial uses.

## LAW

You are breaking the law if you possess, use, grow, import or sell cannabis (marijuana), cannabis resin (hash) or hash oil. In NSW, if you are found guilty of possessing or using cannabis, you could get a fine of up to \$2,200, and/or other penalties including community service work or a term in prison of up to 2 years. These penalties apply to both adults and young people aged between 10 and 18 years. For growing, importing or selling cannabis, the penalties are more severe. The severity of the penalty depends on the amount of cannabis, if it was being sold, and if you have prior convictions. You may get a criminal record if you are found guilty of possessing, or selling cannabis. This makes it hard to get a job, a credit card, or a visa to travel to other countries.

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## DOSE

The strength of cannabis varies greatly from one variety to another. Some, known as 'one-hit-shit', requires only a single lung-full to reach full effects while other varieties require many hits to achieve the same effects. Additionally, the amount that one individual likes to smoke can be many times what another prefers. Generally, 1/8 ounce (3.5 g) of mid-quality bud could get around 20-30 people reasonably high

## EFFECTS

### Onset

When smoked, the effects of cannabis begin almost immediately. When eaten the effects can take 1 to 2 hours to manifest, based primarily on how much food is in the stomach.

### Duration

The effects of smoked cannabis peak after about 20 minutes and last for 1-2 hours. When eaten, the effects will peak more slowly and primary effects may last for 3-4 hours.

## CANNABIS CAUTIONING SCHEME

On 3 April 2000, the NSW Government introduced the Cannabis Cautioning Scheme. Under this scheme, police can issue a caution to adults in possession of up to 15g of cannabis leaf (about enough for 15-25 joints). A Caution provides a warning of the health and legal consequences of using cannabis and information on where to seek treatment. This scheme does not mean that cannabis is now legal or decriminalised. Rather that police have the discretion to issue a caution for small amounts of cannabis. At all times police retain the option of charging people for these offences.

## CHEMISTRY

The active ingredients in cannabis are called cannabinoids. There are many cannabinoids synthesized by the plant including tetrahydrocannabinol, cannabidiol, cannabidiol, cannabidiolic acid, cannabigerol, and cannabichromene. Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol is thought to be responsible for most of the psychoactive effects of cannabis and is the active ingredient in synthetic thc pills such as marinol.

## PRODUCTION

Cannabis plants do grow wild in many parts of the world, but the quality of wild specimens ('ditch-weed') is generally quite low. Most cannabis is cultivated intentionally and can be grown either indoors or out.

## HISTORY

The cannabis plant has been used both medicinally and recreationally for thousands of years. It wasn't until the early 19th century that the use of cannabis spread from China and the Middle East to the population of Europe and then to America in the middle of the century. Cannabis was made illegal in the U.S. in 1937 and has continued to be a popular recreational substance since that time.

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## THE EXPERIENCE

The primary effects sought by those using cannabis recreationally are euphoria, relaxation, and changes in perception. Effects vary depending on dosage, with effects at low doses including a sense of well-being, mild enhancement of senses (smell, taste, hearing), subtle changes in thought and expression, talkativeness, giggling, increased appreciation of music, increased appetite, and mild closed-eye visuals. At higher doses, visuals may become more prominent, sense of time is altered, attention span and memory are frequently affected, and thought processes and mental perception may be significantly altered.

## VISUALS

While most people do not experience a strong visual component to the cannabis experience, some do and some particular varieties of cannabis as well as higher doses are more likely to produce this effect.

## PROBLEMS

Negative effects can include paranoia, dry mouth, respiratory problems and nervousness/racing heart. Other effects may be negative or inconvenient in certain settings or situations including reduced ability to concentrate, impaired memory, tiredness, and confusion. Side effects tend to increase with lifetime use: as users age, they often report the anxiety-producing and uncomfortable effects increase and the euphoria decreases.

## CONTRAINDICATIONS

Avoid Driving - While there has been little formal study into the effects of cannabis on driving, it is generally a good idea to avoid driving while under the influence of **any** psychoactive or intoxicating substance. Several studies have shown that drivers who use alcohol and cannabis in combination are far less capable than when taking either substance alone. Some studies have shown that cannabis causes impairment in driving performance, but that users often are aware of the impairment and compensate by driving more carefully.

## LONG TERM HEALTH PROBLEMS

The most common negative health impacts of regular cannabis smoking are lung and throat problems including: coughing, increased frequency of throat and lung infections, and reduced lung capacity. There are concerns about possible long term carcinogenic (cancer causing) effects of cannabis smoking, but the results are still somewhat controversial. It can be safely said, however, that health risks increase with frequency and duration of smoking anything.

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## DEPENDENCE POTENTIAL

Regular use of cannabis can lead to psychological habituation for some people making it difficult for them to quit. Studies have estimated that between 5 and 10% of those who try smoking cannabis will become daily users sometime during their life, but most of these smokers will have given up the habit by age 30 and few remain daily smokers after age 40. Most people do not experience signs of physical addiction, but with regular daily use, mild to medium withdrawal symptoms usually occur for less than a week, but can extend for as long as 6 weeks

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## HEART ISSUES

Because cannabis increases heart rate, it could potentially increase risks of heart problems in those at risk of heart disease. One study found that cannabis use increased the risk of heart attack in men over 40, but its findings were weak and based on a very small number of individuals. In a large study of 65,000 individuals in California by Sidney et al in 1997, cannabis was not found to increase mortality rates among users under 50.

## MENTAL ILLNESS

Several studies have indicated that cannabis use (like many other strong psychoactives) can precipitate neuroses or psychoses in those who are already at risk. Studies have also shown that cannabis use does not appear to increase the risk of psychosis in otherwise healthy individuals.

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