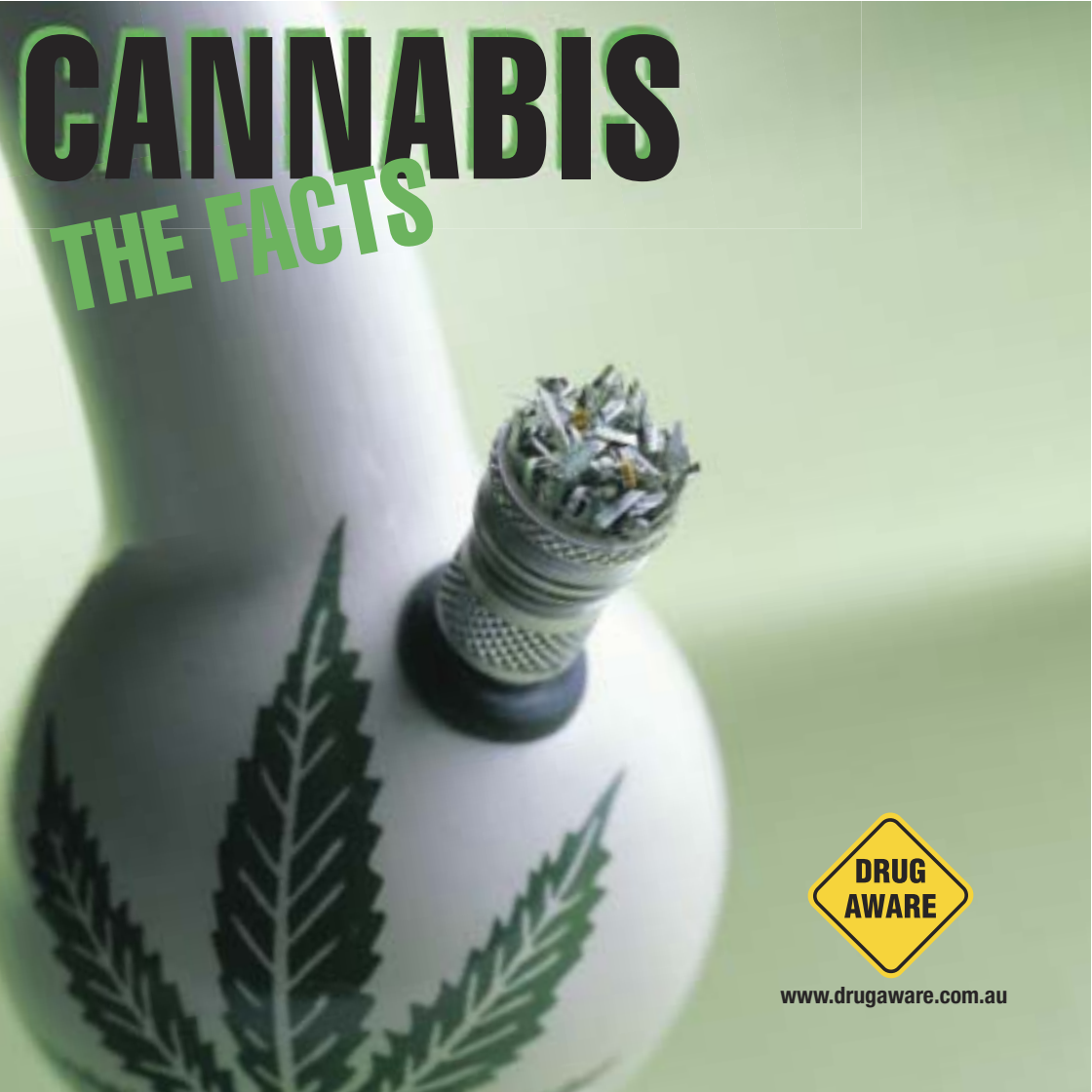


# CANNABIS

## THE FACTS



[www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)



## **CANNABIS AND THE LAW**

It is **against the law** to cultivate, possess, use, sell or supply cannabis. It is also against the law to possess pipes or other implements on which there are detectable traces of cannabis.

The possession of small amounts of cannabis is still an offence. The Cannabis Infringement Notice (CIN) Scheme enables police, at their discretion, to issue an infringement notice for possession of small amounts of cannabis. If a person receives a CIN and pays the financial penalty or attends a Cannabis Education Session (CES), the person will not be required to appear in court and will not incur a criminal record.

## **WHAT IS CANNABIS?**

### **MULL, POT, DOPE, WEED, LEAF, GUNGA, MARIJUANA**

Cannabis is difficult to classify pharmacologically because it has a variety of effects. It is primarily a depressant drug, however, it can have hallucinogenic and some stimulant properties.

Delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis. This chemical affects a person's mood and perception. Marijuana, hashish and hashish oil come from the cannabis plant.

Cannabis is made from the dried leaves and flowers of the plant. Its colour ranges from greyish-green to greenish-brown. The texture of cannabis can be fine, like dried herbs, or coarse, like tea. It is usually smoked in hand-rolled cigarettes called joints or water pipes called bongs.

**Remember, growing and using cannabis is against the law because cannabis is harmful.**

**Hashish** (hash) is the dried, compressed resin extract from the flowering tops of the female plant. Hashish ranges in colour from light brown to nearly black. It is more potent than marijuana. Hashish is usually smoked through a pipe or cooked in foods and eaten.

**Hashish oil** is a thick and oily liquid extract from the cannabis plant. It is reddish-brown in colour. The THC is very concentrated and a small amount will produce marked effects. Hashish oil is usually added to joints or cooked in foods and eaten.

## WHERE DOES CANNABIS COME FROM?

Cannabis is the short name for the hemp plant *Cannabis Sativa*. It is thought to have originated in Asia and reached Europe more than a thousand years ago.

## HOW IS CANNABIS USED?

Cannabis is usually smoked. The THC is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream through the walls of the lungs. The intoxicating or high effect is felt when the THC reaches the brain. This can happen within a few minutes and may last for up to five hours.

When cannabis is eaten, the absorption of THC is much slower, taking up to three hours to enter the bloodstream. When it is eaten, the amount of food in the stomach, characteristics of the user (e.g. weight, gender and other drugs used) will determine how quickly a person feels the effects.

## HOW MANY PEOPLE USE CANNABIS?

The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey reported that 40% of Western Australians aged 14 years and above had ever used cannabis. In total, 14% had used cannabis in the last 12 months and 8% in the last four weeks. Use of cannabis in respondents' lifetime, the last 12 months and the last four weeks was highest among 20- to 29-year-olds (64%, 32% and 18% respectively).

# HEALTH EFFECTS OF USING CANNABIS

The effects of cannabis and the risks will vary from person to person depending on characteristics of the:

**Individual (user)** - Mood, physical size, physical and mental health, gender, previous experience with cannabis, expectations of the drug and personality.

**Drug** - The amount used, the content of THC and whether it is smoked or eaten.

**Setting (environment)** - Whether the person is using with friends, on his/her own, in a social setting or at home, at work or before driving.

<b>SHORT-TERM EFFECTS</b>	<b>SHORT-TERM EFFECTS OF HIGHER DOSES</b>	<b>LONG-TERM EFFECTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• loss of concentration</li><li>• impaired balance</li><li>• loss of inhibitions</li><li>• reduced coordination</li><li>• feeling of wellbeing</li><li>• increased heart rate</li><li>• reddened eyes</li><li>• increased appetite</li><li>• talkativeness</li><li>• tunnel awareness - where a person focuses their awareness on one thing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• confusion</li><li>• restlessness</li><li>• detachment from reality</li><li>• excitement</li><li>• hallucinations</li><li>• anxiety</li><li>• panic attacks</li><li>• respiratory problems</li><li>• mental health problems in those who are vulnerable</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• bronchitis</li><li>• lung cancer</li><li>• decreased concentration</li><li>• decreased memory and learning abilities</li><li>• dependence</li><li>• interference with sexual drive and hormone production</li><li>• mental health problems in those who are vulnerable</li></ul>

## **CANNABIS AND OTHER DRUGS**

Using cannabis with other drugs increases risks. If cannabis is used in conjunction with other depressant drugs the depressant action generally increases. When cannabis is combined with alcohol it can frequently lead to behaviour which causes injuries. For example, because cannabis interferes with a person's motor and coordination skills, vision and perceptions of time and space, the ability to drive safely and complete tasks that require concentration can be impaired. This impairment increases substantially when cannabis is used with alcohol.

## **CANNABIS AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS**

The frequent or even occasional use of cannabis can cause anxiety, depression, paranoia and psychosis in those people who have a vulnerability to mental health problems.

## **CANNABIS AND THE BRAIN**

Frequent use of cannabis can affect the brain by decreasing the user's ability to concentrate and remember things and can also impact on learning ability.

## **CANNABIS AND RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS**

Frequent use of cannabis can increase the risk of cancer and respiratory disorders such as asthma, bronchitis and emphysema.

## **CANNABIS AND RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS**

Drug use can lead to social and emotional problems and affect a person's relationship with family and friends. For example, one of the effects of cannabis can be loss of inhibitions. This may lead to a person saying or doing something that they would not normally do. This in turn may lead to embarrassing or regrettable situations.

Cannabis can also impact on other things in a person's life. Some adolescents have commented that their friends who are cannabis users won't go out with them as often and can't be bothered doing things.

Cannabis use can create major problems in families.

## CANNABIS AND TOLERANCE, DEPENDENCE AND WITHDRAWAL

Regular, heavy cannabis use can lead to tolerance and dependence.

**Tolerance** – This means that more cannabis is needed to produce the same effects felt previously with smaller amounts.

**Dependence** – This means that cannabis becomes central to a person's life.

**Withdrawal** – This occurs when a person either significantly reduces the amount of cannabis they use, or stops using cannabis altogether. When withdrawing from cannabis, symptoms can include sleep and appetite disturbances.

## CANNABIS AND OVERDOSE

The toxicity of cannabis is very low. There have been no confirmed deaths directly from cannabis overdose. Cannabis use can lead to a number of serious negative health consequences and can increase the risk of injury to yourself and to others.

## CANNABIS, PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

Only a limited amount is known about the effects of cannabis on the unborn child. However, the use of cannabis during pregnancy is not recommended. If cannabis is used in pregnancy the baby may be born smaller and lighter than other babies. Low birth weight can be associated with infections and breathing problems.

Little is known about the effects of cannabis smoking on breastfeeding. It is believed that some of the drug will pass through the breast milk to the baby, with risks to the child.

It is recommended that women check with their doctor (or other health professional) if they are using or planning to use drugs while pregnant or breastfeeding, including prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.

## CANNABIS AND FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

The street price of cannabis varies depending on availability, how it is grown and market trends. The cost of purchasing cannabis can lead to financial problems for both occasional and regular users.

## CANNABIS AND DRIVING

Using cannabis affects a person's driving ability by:

- slowing the driver's reaction time
- distorting the driver's perceptions
- decreasing the ability to coordinate appropriate reaction when driving.

Driving while under the influence of cannabis and alcohol combined is dangerous and greatly increases risk to yourself and others on the road.

In Western Australia, it is against the law for anyone to drive under the influence of drugs, including cannabis. The *Road Traffic Act 1974 Section 63* states that 'a person who drives or attempts to drive a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or alcohol and drugs to such an extent as to be incapable of having proper control of the vehicle commits an offence, and the offender may be arrested without warrant'. Breaking this law carries penalties including disqualification from driving, fines and/or imprisonment. A person convicted of an offence under the *Road Traffic Act 1974* is liable for the following:

### **First Offence**

- a fine ranging from \$400 to \$2,500
- disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence for up to six months.

## **Second Offence**

- a fine ranging from \$800 to \$3,500 or imprisonment for six months
- disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence for up to two years.

## **Third or Subsequent Offence**

- a fine ranging from \$800 to \$5,000 or imprisonment for up to 18 months
- permanent disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence.

## **The Cannabis Infringement Notice Scheme**

The Cannabis Infringement Notice Scheme enables police, at their discretion, to issue an infringement notice for possession of small amounts of cannabis. People who receive a CIN will be required to pay a financial penalty within 28 days, complete a Cannabis Education Session within 28 days or can choose to have the matter heard in court. There is a limit to the number of times within a three-year period that a person who is issued with a CIN may choose to pay a financial penalty rather than complete a CES or go to court. A person who is issued with one or more CINs on each of three separate days within a three-year period will be required on the third and any subsequent occasion to attend a Cannabis Education Session or go to court, and will not be eligible to pay a financial penalty.

If police have relevant evidence, a person found in possession of a small amount of cannabis could still be charged with the more serious offence of possession of cannabis with intent to sell or supply.

The CIN scheme does not apply to possession by an adult of any quantities of cannabis resin (hash), hash oil, or other cannabis derivatives.

## **The Cannabis Infringement Notice Scheme does not apply to people under 18 years**

Under the *Young Offenders Act 1994*, young people (aged 10 to 17 years inclusively) who are found growing, in possession of, or using cannabis within the limits set by the CIN scheme may be cautioned or referred to a Juvenile Justice Team.

**A Cannabis Infringement Notice can be issued in the following instances:**

- possession by an adult of no more than 15 grams of cannabis - (penalty \$100)
- possession by an adult of more than 15 grams, and no more than 30 grams of cannabis - (penalty \$150)
- possession by an adult of no more than two cannabis plants under cultivation at that person's principal place of residence provided that the plants are not hydroponically grown and that no other person is growing other cannabis plants on the same premises - (penalty \$200)
- possession by an adult of pipes and other implements for use in smoking cannabis on which there are detectable traces of cannabis - (penalty \$100).

Under the *Misuse of Drugs Act 1981* police have the power to seize and destroy cannabis, cannabis plants and/or pipes or other implements (with detectable traces of cannabis) when a CIN is issued.

If you would like more information about cannabis or how to access support services in Western Australia, go to the More Information section at the end of this booklet.

## **CANNABIS AND TAKING CARE**

To be safe, cannabis use should be avoided. However, if you use the drug or know someone who does, remember the following:

- Smoking cannabis can lead to similar health effects as smoking tobacco
- Don't drive or operate machinery. These activities can be dangerous while under the influence of cannabis
- Because using cannabis can have harmful effects, users may find themselves in dangerous situations. Therefore, they should not be left alone. If the situation becomes unsafe call for help immediately
- If you suspect any bad effects, call an ambulance immediately. Don't delay, you could save a life. The ambulance officers are there to help you. Be sure to describe what drug the person has taken. If the person is unconscious and you know first aid, place them in the recovery position and ensure the airway is clear. If they have stopped breathing, perform Expired Air Resuscitation (EAR). The police are not required to attend unless a death has occurred or the ambulance officers are threatened.

## **CANNABIS AND TREATMENT PATHWAYS**

There are a variety of treatment pathways available for people with cannabis-related problems. The drug(s) used and the availability of services as well as the user's health, desired outcome, support network and unique circumstances need to be taken into consideration. Deciding on the best treatment pathway or combination of pathways is best done in consultation with a drug and alcohol counsellor.

## MORE INFORMATION

For up-to-date information about cannabis or other drugs call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service or Parent Drug Information Service, or visit [www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)

### Alcohol and Drug Information Service

- Access information about drugs confidentially and quickly.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol or other drugs.
- Find out about other services.

(08) 9442 5000

1800 198 024 toll free country callers

### Parent Drug Information Service

- Drug information and support for parents and family members.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol and other drugs.
- Talk confidentially to another parent for strategies and support.
- Find out where to go for further help.

(08) 9442 5050

1800 653 203 toll free country callers

[www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)

- Access detailed information about drugs.
- Find out about the latest hot issues.
- Post questions and have them answered anonymously by health professionals.
- Find links to other useful sites.

*For further information about the Drug and Alcohol Office's Prevention Directorate programs, publications or resources call (08) 9370 0358 or visit [www.dao.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.dao.health.wa.gov.au)*



## REFERENCES

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Changes in circumstances after the date of publication of this brochure inevitably will result in this brochure becoming outdated in some respects. It is the responsibility of readers of this brochure to keep themselves updated with any changes or developments.



[www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)

**For information on cannabis, visit [www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)  
or for confidential advice and counselling call the Alcohol and  
Drug Information Service 24 hour helpline  
on 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers).**