

Cannabis and Smoking Health

Acute Tobacco Dependency Treatment Services

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Cannabis Use

Key Points:

There are serious health risks from smoking cannabis. Many people who smoke cannabis also use tobacco, so the risks are in addition to the harm caused by smoking.

- None of the 7,000+ studies into cannabis have shown it to be safe.
- Cannabis contains more than 400 chemicals, including most toxins found in tobacco smoke but often in higher concentrations.
- People who smoke cannabis are likely to develop respiratory problems like tobacco smokers – cough, phlegm, chest colds and bronchitis.
- Half of regular users have pre-cancerous changes in the cells of the lungs.
- The risk of a heart attack is four times higher than usual in the hour after smoking cannabis.
- Cannabis is the most common illegal drug in the UK.
- Cannabis users are more likely to use other drugs, such as cocaine.
- Reaction times for skills such as driving are reduced by 41% after smoking one joint and by 63% after smoking two.

What is Cannabis?

Cannabis is a general term for several psychoactive preparations of the hemp plant, cannabis sativa. They include marijuana leaf (grass, pot, dope, weed or reefers), sinsemilla (skunk) made from buds and flowers of female plants, resin (bhang, Ganja and hashish) from the flowering heads of the plant and hashish oil, a tar-like liquid distilled from hashish. Cannabis contains over 60 cannabinoids. The most active constituent is THC (delta-9- tetrahydrocannabinol). THC can be detected in urine weeks after using cannabis. All forms of cannabis are mind-altering drugs.

Effects of Cannabis?

Cannabis is mildly hallucinogenic; the effect of cannabis depends on the strength of the THC it contains. Most marijuana leaf has an average of 9% THC; sinsemilla has an average of 15%; hashish has an average of 5% and hashish oil has an average of 20%. Today's cannabis is up to ten times stronger than cannabis used in the 1970s.

Cannabis Use:

It is usually smoked as a cigarette or 'joint', in a pipe (or bong) or as 'blunts', which are marijuana 'cigars' sometimes combined with other drugs, such as crack.

Cannabis is also added to food or brewed as a tea.

Is Cannabis Addictive?

Nicotine is more addictive than cannabis. But a recent study found that when abstaining from cannabis for just three days, regular users had withdrawal symptoms such as cravings, decreased appetite, sleep difficulty, weight loss, anger, irritability and restlessness. Cannabis use is three times more likely to lead to dependency among young people than adults.

Dangers for Young People:

The younger someone starts using cannabis, the more likely that person is to experiment with other drugs. The effects of cannabis can interfere with learning by impairing thinking, reading, verbal and mathematical skills. Studies show that students do not remember what they learned when they were 'high'.

Is smoking Cannabis less harmful than Tobacco?

Smoking 3 to 5 cannabis cigarettes is as dangerous as smoking 20 tobacco cigarettes. People who smoke cannabis draw more smoke, inhale more deeply and hold it in the lungs for longer. Cannabis cigarettes have no filter and deliver four times more tar than tobacco cigarettes.

As cannabis may worsen anxiety and paranoia in some people, only use it where you feel safe and with people you trust. Avoid using cannabis if you're prone to anxiety or have existing mental health problems.

Quite simply, completely stopping smoking cannabis with tobacco significantly improves clients' chances of becoming smokefree.

Long Term Health Risks:

Researchers studied the health of 450 people who smoke cannabis daily but did not use tobacco. They found that people who smoke cannabis have more sick days and more doctor visits for chest problems and other illnesses than a similar group who did not smoke.

Short Term Effects:

- Dry Mouth
- Problems with memory and learning
- Trouble thinking and problem-solving
- Loss of motor coordination
- Increased heart rate and anxiety
- Distorted perceptions-sight, sound, time and touch

Long Term Effects:

- Difficulty Sleeping
- Vivid dreams
- Low Mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability
- Cravings

Withdrawal Symptoms:

- Tremor
 - Irritability
 - Feeling anxious or worried
 - Feeling depressed
 - Feeling tired during the day
 - Lack of appetite and weight loss
 - Headaches
 - Sweating
 - Digestion problems, cramps and nausea
 - Having trouble sleeping, with nightmares and vivid dreams
- Fever or Chills
 - Restlessness

Cannabis and the Heart:

The smoke from cannabis contains carbon monoxide that reduces the body's ability to carry oxygen. Cannabis use increases the heart rate by up to 50%. It can cause chest pain in people with poor blood supply to the heart.

Cannabis and the Brain:

THC changes how sensory information gets into the hippocampus – the brain's system for learning, memory and emotions. THC suppresses neurons in the information processing system of the hippocampus. Cannabis can make some existing mental health symptoms worse and has been linked with the possible development of mental health issues.

Cannabis, Fertility and Reproduction:

Cannabis use can cause a temporary loss of fertility in men and women. It is particularly harmful to young people as, at this age, they are undergoing a period of rapid physical and sexual development. Smoking cannabis during pregnancy can result in premature babies and low birth weights. Babies born to women who used cannabis during pregnancy show altered responses to visual stimulation, increased tremors, and a high-pitched cry. This signals problems with the development of the nervous system.

Cannabis and the Lungs:

People who smoke cannabis have the same respiratory problems as tobacco smokers – coughs, chronic bronchitis and phlegm. Cannabis smoke deposits about 3 to 5 times more carbon monoxide and tar on the lungs than tobacco smoke. A study of 450 people who smoke cannabis regularly took lung biopsies and found that half had precancerous cell abnormalities.

The longer someone has been using cannabis, or the more frequently they have been using it, the more likely they are to develop withdrawal symptoms when they stop.

When Quitting Cannabis is a problem?

[Honest information about drugs | FRANK](#)

www.knowcannabis.org.uk

Marijuana Anonymous: They are run by people who have experience of cannabis use. They offer a 12-step recovery programme for people who want to quit cannabis use and are free to use.

Telephone: 0300 124 0373

Email: helpline@marijuana-anonymous.org.uk

Website: www.marijuana-anonymous.org.uk

Adfam: A national charity for families and friends of drug users. It offers support groups and confidential support and information.

Telephone admin: 020 3817 9410 Address: 2nd Floor, 120 Cromer Street, London, WC1H 8BS Email: admin@adfam.org.uk

Website: www.adfam.org.uk

Other sources of information:

Lincolnshire Recovery Partnership: 08003047021 Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Website: [Lincolnshire Recovery Partnership](#)

One You Lincolnshire: 01522 705162

Main Switch board for hospital: Lincoln County: (01522) 512512

Pilgrim Hospital Boston: (01205) 364801

Grantham & District Hospital: (01476) 565232

PALs: Lincoln County: (01522) 707071

Pilgrim Hospital Boston: (01205) 446243

Is your cannabis use putting you at risk. CUDIT Survey.

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

The Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test - Revised (CUDIT-R)

Have you used any cannabis over the past six months? YES / NO

If YES, please answer the following questions about your cannabis use.

Circle the response that is most correct for you in relation to your cannabis use over the past six months

1.	How often do you use cannabis?	Never 0	Monthly or less 1	2-4 times a month 2	2-3 times a week 3	4 or more times a week 4
2.	How many hours were you "stoned" on a typical day when you had been using cannabis?	Less than 1 0	1 or 2 1	3 or 4 2	5 or 6 3	7 or more 4
3.	How often during the past 6 months did you find that you were not able to stop using cannabis once you had started?	Never 0	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
4.	How often during the past 6 months did you fail to do what was normally expected from you because of using cannabis?	Never 0	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
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	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
6.	How often in the past 6 months have you had a problem with your memory or concentration after using cannabis?	Never 0	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
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	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
8.	Have you ever thought about cutting down, or stopping, your use of cannabis?	Never 0	Yes, but not in the past 6 months 2		Yes, during the past 6 months 4	

This scale is in the public domain and is free to use with appropriate citation:

Adamson SJ, Kay-Lambkin FJ, Baker AL, Lewin TJ, Thornton L, Kelly BJ, and Sellman JD. (2010). An Improved Brief Measure of Cannabis Misuse: The Cannabis Use Disorders Identification Test – Revised (CUDIT-R). *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 110:137-143.

Now, add up your scores for all the 8 questions:

Between 1-8 = Low risk

Between 9 - 16 = Hazardous cannabis use. You are likely to be having cannabis related problems.

17 or over = High level of cannabis use. You are most likely dependant on the drug.

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

References:

- This leaflet has been reproduced with permission from Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust: Cannabis & Smoking Health. Tobacco Dependency Treatment Services patient information leaflet. Ref No: PL/1484 (v1) (12/2023)
- Adamson, S.J., Kay-Lambkin, F.J., Baker, A.L., Lewin, T.J., Thornton, L., Kelly, B.J., *et al.* (2010) An Improved Brief Measure of Cannabis Misuse: The Cannabis Use Disorders Identification Test-Revised (CUDIT-R). *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 110, 137-143.
- National Centre for Smoking Cessation: Smoking & Cannabis Use – A guide for stop smoking practitioners. 2020 (reviewed Feb 2025)

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www.accessable.co.uk/united-lincolnshire-hospitals-nhs-trust

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