

# THE FACTS

## Cannabis

Weed, skunk, hash, pot, dope, draw, spliff, joint, ganja, marijuana, puff, hash, grass, bud, resin, wacky baccy

### What is cannabis?

Cannabis is a naturally occurring drug that is made from the cannabis plant. Cannabis comes in many different forms, including resin (usually known as hash or solid) and the dried leaves of the plant (usually known as marijuana or grass). Some varieties of the cannabis plant are more potent, and these are often referred to as skunk. It can also come in a liquid 'oil' form.

### What does cannabis look like?

Cannabis resin is a black or brown solid block that can be crumbled.

Marijuana or grass is the dried leaves and flowers of the plant which have a green, herb-like appearance. Skunk is the strongly scented dried flowers, or 'bud'.

### How do people take cannabis?

Cannabis can be eaten (usually baked in a cake or biscuits), drunk as a tea, or, most commonly smoked. When people smoke cannabis they sometimes mix it with tobacco before rolling it in cigarette papers ('spliff' or 'joint'), or they might use a pipe or water pipe (a 'bong').

### Why do people take cannabis?

Cannabis is usually taken for its relaxing effects, and can make people feel happy, chilled out and may cause people to get the giggles or talk a lot. It can make users more aware of their senses, and can have hallucinogenic effects (meaning you might see or hear things which are not there).

The effects of cannabis can come on within a few minutes of taking the drug, and can last for hours depending on how much has been taken. If you eat cannabis, the effects take longer to start, but last for longer as well.

## What are the risks?

Cannabis can make users feel very hungry ('the munchies'), get a dry mouth and/or red eyes and feel tired. Cannabis can make people feel anxious, suspicious or paranoid. It can make people feel light-headed and sick; this is sometimes known as a 'whitey'.

Cannabis can cause a number of other unwanted effects including sleeplessness, prolonged anxiety or paranoia, panic, hallucinations, and affect the user's mood. With repeated use, users can become demotivated and have problems with short term memory.

If people already have illnesses such as depression or schizophrenia, cannabis can make this worse. Using cannabis regularly has been associated with an increased risk of developing mental illness, particularly in young people. Cannabis users whose family members have had such conditions may have a higher risk.

As cannabis can affect the heart rate and blood pressure, those with heart problems must be particularly careful. Low doses or weaker cannabis may mean that the effects are minimal but some types are very strong so users must be careful not to take too much if they don't know the strength of what they are taking.

Cannabis can be 'cut' with other substances. This means that these other (unknown) substances are inhaled into the lungs. Like tobacco, cannabis smoke is carcinogenic and is associated with different cancers including lung cancer and throat cancer.

## Is it addictive?

Cannabis can be psychologically addictive, with users getting cravings for cannabis and having difficulty not using it.

If people who have used cannabis regularly stop suddenly, they can experience feelings of vulnerability, mood swings, depression, panic attacks, or difficulty sleeping or concentrating.

## Is it illegal?

Yes, cannabis is a Class B drug and it's illegal to have, sell or give away (which is still considered 'supplying' under the law).

## What if you're caught?

If you're caught by the police with cannabis on you, you might get a warning, a reprimand, a formal caution, a fixed penalty (fine), or you could even be arrested and prosecuted. The maximum penalty for possession of a class B drug is 5 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both. If you are caught supplying (including giving it to your friends) the penalty could be up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.

As with alcohol, it is illegal to take drugs and drive, and you could lose your licence, be fined or even go to prison if you are caught driving while under the influence.

Updated October 2017