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CANNABIS

What is cannabis?

Cannabis is derived from the cannabis plant (*cannabis sativa*). It grows wild in many of the tropical and temperate areas of the world. It can be grown in almost any climate, and is increasingly cultivated by means of indoor hydroponic technology.

The main active ingredient in cannabis is called delta-9 tetrahydro-cannabinol, commonly known as THC. This is the part of the plant that gives the 'high'.

Cannabis is used recreationally in three main forms, marijuana, hashish and hash oil. Marijuana is made from dried flowers and leaves of the cannabis plant. It is the least potent of all the cannabis products and usually contains between 1-5% THC, although some stronger products have been noted. It is usually smoked but can be mixed with food and eaten. Hashish is made from the resin (a secreted gum) of the cannabis plant. It is dried and pressed into small blocks and smoked. It can also be added to food and eaten.

Hash oil, the most potent cannabis product, is a thick oil obtained from hashish. It is also smoked. Hash oil is not readily available in Australia.

Cannabis is usually smoked in hand-rolled cigarettes (known as joints or reefers) or in special pipes (bongs). These pipes or bongs can be bought or made by the user. Young people who make bongs might use orange juice containers, soft drink cans or even toilet rolls.

How many people use cannabis?

Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in Australia. According to the 2004 National Drug Household Survey, 34% of the Australian population reported using cannabis at some time, with 11% having used it in the last 12 months.

- **26% of 14-19 year olds reported ever using cannabis**
- **55% of 20-29 year olds reported ever using the drug**

The average age at first use was 18.7 years.

The 2002 Secondary School Survey also indicated that young people attending high school across Australia also had high rates of cannabis use with 28% of 12-17 year old males and 23%

of females ever reporting use.

- **46% of 17 year old males reported ever using cannabis**
- **38% of 17 year old females reported ever using cannabis**
- **11% of 12 year old males reported ever using cannabis**
- **7% of 12 year old females reported ever using cannabis**

Other names for cannabis

Cannabis is also known as marijuana, grass, pot, dope, Mary Jane, hooch, weed, hash, joints, brew, reefers, cones, smoke, mull, buddha, ganga, hydro, yarndi, heads and green.

What are the short-term effects of cannabis?

The short-term effects of using cannabis may include:

- **feeling of well-being**
- **talkativeness**
- **drowsiness**
- **loss of inhibitions**
- **decreased nausea**
- **increased appetite**
- **loss of co-ordination**
- **bloodshot eyes**
- **dryness of the eyes, mouth and throat**
- **anxiety and paranoia**

What are the long-term effects of cannabis?

There is limited research on the long-term effects of cannabis. On the available evidence, the major probable adverse effects are:

- **increased risk of respiratory diseases associated with smoking, including cancer**
- **dependence**
- **decreased memory and learning abilities**
- **decreased motivation in areas such as study, work or concentration**

There is little evidence to support the claim that cannabis causes mental illness. However, it is believed that cannabis may be an effective 'key' to unlock pre-existing mental illnesses in those

who are susceptible

NDARC FACT SHEET

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