



connect
wellbeing, ability, recovery

CANNABIS

Information, guidance and advice

What is cannabis?

IT'S THE MOST WIDELY-USED ILLEGAL DRUG IN N. IRELAND, ALTHOUGH THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE USING IT ARE FALLING.

Cannabis is naturally occurring - it is made from the cannabis plant.

The main active chemical in it is tetrahydrocannabinol (or THC for short).

THC is the ingredient in cannabis that can make you feel very chilled out, happy and relaxed.

THC can also make you hallucinate, meaning that it can alter your senses, so that you might see, hear or feel things in a different way to normal.

A big myth about cannabis is that it's safe because it's natural. Cannabis has some very real and harmful effects on your mind and body, as well as creating longer-term problems:

- Cannabis can make you feel very anxious and even paranoid. Using it has also been linked, in some people, to serious, long-term mental health problems.
- Tobacco and cannabis share some of the same chemical 'nasties' and just like smoking tobacco, smoking cannabis has been linked to lung diseases like tuberculosis and lung cancer.

Cannabis can mess with your body.

- Tobacco and cannabis share some of the same chemical 'nasties', so, like smoking tobacco, smoking cannabis can make asthma worse, can cause wheezing in people without asthma and can even lead to lung cancer.
- When people mix cannabis with tobacco they're also taking on all the risks associated with smoking tobacco, which can range from coughs and chest infections to cancer or heart disease.
- It can increase the heart rate and affect blood pressure, which can be especially harmful for those with heart disease.
- It is reported that frequent use of cannabis may affect fertility. It can cut a man's sperm count and can suppress ovulation in women.
- If you are pregnant, smoking cannabis may increase the risk of your baby being born smaller than expected.

Cannabis can mess with your mind

For people with illnesses such as schizophrenia, cannabis can cause a serious relapse.

Regular cannabis use is known to be associated with an increase in the risk of later developing psychotic illnesses including schizophrenia and if you have a family background of mental illness, you may also have an increased risk.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF



Cannabis can freak you out – it can cause feelings of anxiety, suspicion, panic and paranoia. Cannabis can affect the way the brain works. Regular, heavy use makes it difficult to learn and concentrate and research has linked cannabis use to poor exam results. This is a potentially serious risk if you are young when the brain is still developing. People who take a lot of cannabis can also find they lack motivation.

A recent review of cannabis research published in the British Medical Journal found those driving under the influence of cannabis had nearly double the risk of a crash.

Mixing cannabis and alcohol?

Mixing cannabis with alcohol can have particularly serious consequences –

Your chance of having an accident is 16 times higher than for cannabis or alcohol alone.

Have a problem with cannabis?

Some users become dependent on cannabis in a similar way to other drugs. Using it most days, over several months or more, can result in psychological dependency. After smoking for an extended period, you may find you now need to smoke more than you used to, to get the same feeling or even just to feel OK.

People using cannabis heavily often say they have problems in various areas of their life – money worries, difficult relationships, conflict with family and friends, struggling to manage work or study commitments, ill-health – especially chest illnesses – and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and in extreme cases, schizophrenia.

If you want to cut down or stop your cannabis use, take it a step at a time:

1. Think about changing

Why do you smoke cannabis? Why do you want to cut down or stop?

2. Plan for the change you want

How are you going to make it happen?

3. Act on your decision

Make a statement to yourself: 'There are going to be no exceptions, I've decided to change and I'm determined to succeed'

4. Have a back-up plan

If you have a lapse, don't beat yourself up or think you're a failure. It is not a major crisis and you can learn from it. Work out what went wrong and how to deal with the situation next time.



How do I stay off?

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

It is often useful to make other changes to your lifestyle in order to be successful in quitting cannabis. Think about what you are going to say to your friends that you used to smoke with. It might be helpful to practice saying things like “I don’t smoke anymore” or “I’ve given up dope”. Change your diet to include healthier food. Set new routines – like increasing exercise. If stress is a major issue for you then learn stress management techniques other than getting stoned, or do your best to avoid stressful situations. Work hard to improve your relationships. Make efforts to meet new people. Try to find new meaning in your life without cannabis.

ANGER AND FRUSTRATION

Anger and frustration can lead to strong urges to get stoned. When you feel impulsive and frustrated try not to get overwhelmed by urges to smoke (eg. “I would die for a bong”). It is helpful to focus on understanding the feelings until the craving passes. Every craving you survive puts you closer to your ultimate long term goal.

AVOIDANCE

Avoid situations that are likely to cause you to relapse. For example, if going to parties where people smoke is going to be difficult, try avoiding parties for the first couple of months after quitting.

ESCAPE

Take a break from situations where other people are smoking or are about to smoke dope. A brief walk or other activity can help you in your quest to give up.

HAVE SOMEONE LISTEN

Let someone listen to you when you need to talk about your change in lifestyle without cannabis. Seek professional advice/help if required.

CLEANING UP MY LIFE

Remove all the things from your home that remind you of cannabis smoking. Consider how the world around you will be a better place if you don’t smoke. Remind yourself that many people have successfully given up and have been able to deal with their problems without cannabis. Be careful not to replace dope with alcohol or lots more cigarettes.



Advice and Getting Help

Getting the correct help and support is crucial to the recovery and success of anyone with issues linked to drug and substance misuse. We would advise anyone who is experiencing problems with drugs to seek help and support immediately. Involving your GP is strongly advised as your GP has a wide variety of services available and can also check to see if you require medical assistance as well as therapeutic support. The community and voluntary sector provides excellent services in partnership with statutory care providers.

Below is a range of info and treatment services available:

Talk to Frank - <https://www.talktofrank.com/>

Addiction NI - <http://addictionni.com/>

Drugs and Alcohol NI - <https://www.drugsandalcoholni.info/>





Discover more information on our website:

www.inspireconnect.info