

Alcohol and Other Drugs

Understanding cannabis.

1800 700 514 (Freecall)
unitingvictas.org.au/aod

What is cannabis?

Cannabis (or marijuana) is the most recognisable and commonly used illicit drug in Australia. Cannabis typically comes as a dry green and brown mixture of flowers, stems and leaves. It's typically smoked in joints or bongs, eaten as gummies or cakes, or drunk as a tea. It's a central nervous system depressant, with the active agent tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) creating the "high".

Common effects include:

- Managing anxiety or depression
- Relief from medication side-effects
- Euphoria
- Feeling relaxed
- Creativity
- Relief from pain
- Sleepiness

Negative effects include:

- Anxiety and depression
- Paranoia or the onset of psychosis
- Hallucinations (auditory and visual)
- Employment issues
- Tolerance can form quickly (2-4 weeks)
- Dizziness and tremors
- Weight gain
- Dehydration
- Persistent cough, chest infections
- Nausea or vomiting
- Memory issues

The effects of cannabis may be quite different if it's used alongside other substances, leading to unpredictable effects. For some people, a family history of mental illness such as schizophrenia can increase the negative side-effects of using cannabis.

Cutting down or quitting

If you notice the negative effects of using cannabis are impacting your life, it might be time to cut back.

Tips for cutting down:

- Delay your first use of the day
- Limit the quantity you take across the day, and how often you use it
- Set yourself weekly reduction goals, and keep a tally of how much you use each day.

Reduce the risks

There are many health risks of smoking cannabis. If you smoke you can reduce the harm to your body by:

- Smoking joints instead of pipes or bongs
- Cleaning pipes or bongs regularly
- Reducing the amount of tobacco in the mix so you inhale fewer chemicals.

Reducing cannabis use can interrupt your sleep patterns.

To improve your sleep you can:

- Get out of bed at the same time each morning, and get some sunlight first thing
- Use up energy during the day so you're tired at night
- Avoid caffeine in the afternoon or evening
- Before bed have a warm shower, drink warm milk, listen to calming music, and avoid screen time
- Go to bed at the same time each night.

It's common for people to have moments where they feel like they're under the influence of cannabis even a few months after stopping use. This is because THC stores in fat cells and breaks down over time, especially when engaging in high intensity exercise. If this happens just remember it will pass soon and that it's quite natural.

The future is bright.



Withdrawal

Cannabis withdrawal symptoms may be greater when withdrawing from multiple substances. Focusing on managing anxiety may help to reduce other symptoms.

1-2 days	May experience agitation, anxiety, depression, headaches, insomnia and disrupted sleep, irritability, lower appetite, return of pain that was being masked, strange or vivid dreams, and sweating.
3-7 days	Withdrawal symptoms will peak and then fade towards the end of that time, especially the physical symptoms.
First 3 weeks	Most of the above will have resolved, with improvements in appetite, mental health and sleep.

It's worth considering how you'll manage common withdrawal effects of increased alertness and lower stress tolerance. Here are some ways you can make the withdrawal easier:

- Aim to keep your mornings gentle and slow, especially if you've been having dreams that disturb your sleep
- Make light exercise a part of every day
- Keep track of what time you usually get cravings, and plan self-care activities for those times
- Consider how you'll manage having less nicotine too – try to avoid smoking more cigarettes to cope
- Have a warm shower before bed – it's relaxing and can improve your sleep.

Understanding the risks of withdrawal

Some medication may be prescribed by your GP for the withdrawal. Be careful of over-using this for anxiety or sleep, and of taking this longer than the advised time. If you are pregnant, it's recommended you stop using cannabis as soon as possible.

Contacts

If you want to talk to someone about your own or someone else's alcohol or other drug use, you can get more information from these Victorian and Tasmanian state-wide services. If you are located in another state, these contacts will direct you to your local support services:

DirectLine

24/7 service offering counselling, information and referrals

T 1800 888 236

directline.org.au

Harm Reduction Victoria

Support and information from other drug using peers.

T 03 9329 1500

hrvic.org.au

Family Drug and Gambling Help

Victorian support for family members.

T 1300 660 068

sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/family-drug-gambling-help

QUIT

T 13 78 48

quit.org.au

Drug alerts

health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/drug-alerts

Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Tasmania Service Directory

atdc.org.au/service-directory

Alcohol and Drug Information Service TAS

24/7 service offering counselling, information and referrals.

T 1800 811 994

Uniting would like to thank consumer partners for drawing on their lived experience to contribute to this series of publications.

