

Cannabis: Physical health risks

Smoking cannabis can;

- make you wheeze and out of breath
- make you cough uncomfortably or painfully
- make your asthma worse if you have it

There's been less research on it but smoking cannabis is likely to have many of the long term physical health risk as smoking tobacco (even if you don't mix the cannabis with tobacco). So smoking cannabis can also;

- increase the risk of lung cancer
- increase your heart rate and affect your blood pressure, which makes it particularly harmful for people with heart disease
- reduce your sperm count if you're male, affecting your ability to have children
- suppress your ovulation if you're female, affecting your ability to have children
- increase the risk of your baby being born smaller than expected if you smoke it while pregnant

Mental health risks

Using cannabis can:

- affect your motivation to do things
- impair your memory so you can't remember things or learn new information
- give you mood swings
- disturb your sleep and make you depressed
- make you anxious, panicky, or even aggressive
- make you see or hear things that aren't there (known as hallucinating or tripping)
- increase your chances of developing illnesses like schizophrenia, especially if you have a family background of mental illness and you start smoking in your teenage years

What is cannabis cut with?

Lots of things. Dealers cut hash with similar-looking substances or heavy materials to increase the weight of the drug and make a bigger profit.

Although not all cannabis is cut, it's very hard to know when it is or isn't – so you could be smoking, eating or vaping chemicals from all sorts of unknown substances, including pesticides used when growing the cannabis.

Tobacco is often mixed with cannabis, for making joints or smoking bong. If you mix cannabis with tobacco you'll be taking on the same risks you get from smoking tobacco.

These are: addiction to nicotine (the drug in tobacco), coughs, chest infections and in the longer-term, cancer and heart disease.

Can you get addicted?

Yes. Heavy cannabis users often get cravings and find it hard not to take the drug – even when they know it's causing them physical, mental or social problems.

When heavy users do try to stop they can:

- feel moody and irritable
- feel sick
- find it hard to sleep
- find it hard to eat
- experience sweating and shaking
- get diarrhoea

If you roll your spliffs with tobacco, you're also at risk of getting addicted (or staying addicted) to nicotine.

The Law

- This is a Class B drug, which means it's illegal to have for yourself, give away or sell.
- Possession can get you up to 5 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.
- Supplying someone else, even your friends, can get you up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.
- If you're caught with cannabis and it's your **second** offence, the police can issue with a fixed-term fee notice, which is an on-the-spot fine for £80.