

Cannabis

Revised by the Cannabis and Youth Project Team

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Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale



What is Cannabis?

- Marijuana is a green, brown, or gray mixture of dried, shredded leaves, stems, seeds and flowers of the cannabis or hemp plant.
- Hash is dark brown or black and comes in solid chunks.
- Hash and hash oil are made from a sticky resin on the cannabis plant.

What is the main ingredient?

- THC (Delta 9 –Tetrahydrocannabinol)
- Cannabis contains an average of 0.5%-3% THC in natural state
- Genetic manipulation and new growing techniques have increased content to between 6%-30%
- Psychoactive effects last up to 2-7 hours
- Inactive metabolites may still be present up to 27 days after ingestion



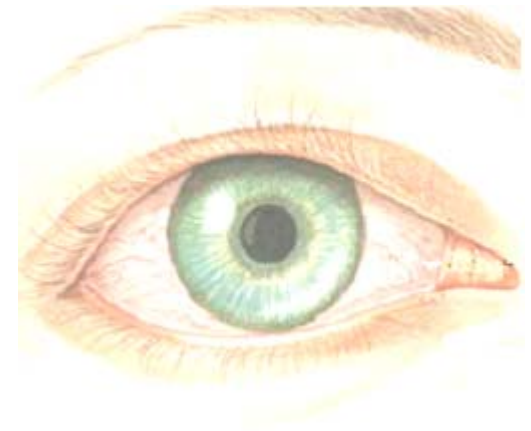
What are 4 ways of consuming it?

- Smoking-as a joint, pipe, bong,water pipe or in a blunt
- Inhaling- hash oil using hot knives
- Eaten- in brownies or baked foods
- Drinking- an “herbal” tea



Physical Effects

- Heart rate and cerebral blood flow increases (increased risk of MI)
- Bronchial passages dilate
- Blood vessels in eyes enlarge
- Dry mouth
- Increased appetite
- Reduction of nausea
- Pain may be reduced



Medicinal Uses

To relieve symptoms of:

- Severe pain
- Nausea
- Weight loss
- Chronic pain
- Seizures
- Muscle spasms
- Cachexia/anorexia

For patients with:

- Multiple sclerosis
- Cancer
- AIDS/HIV Infection
- Spinal Cord Injury or disease
- Arthritis
- Epilepsy

Health Risks

- Effects the respiratory and cardiovascular systems
- Increases the risk of head and neck cancer
- Chronic users of marijuana tend to be heavy smokers, compounding their health risks



Which is worse : cigarette smoke or cannabis smoke?

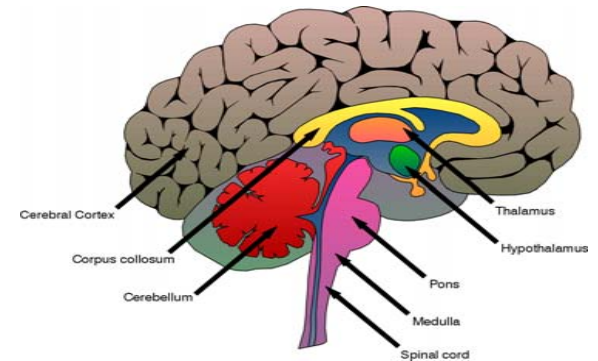
- When comparing cigarette smokers who smoked 20 or more cigarettes a day to marijuana smokers who smoked 3 to 4 joints per day:
 - the marijuana smokers coughed and wheezed as much as the cigarette smokers.
 - In both groups, about 1 in 5 complained of coughing up phlegm & suffering bouts of bronchitis. (Tashkin Study)
- Cannabis contains approx. 400 toxic chemicals with 4 x tar of inhaled cigarettes and 1/3 more tar retained

Emotional Effects

- Euphoria – pleasant sensations, feelings of well-being
- Relaxed, possibly sleepy
- May feel depressed, anxious, fearful or panicky
- Hallucinations, delusions have been reported with high doses

Cognitive Effects

- Perceptions more intense
- Time and space distortions
- Diminished short-term memory
- Inability to pay attention and concentrate



Acute Psychomotor Effects

- Diminished reflexes
- Problems with coordination
- Impaired ability to perform complex tasks
- Difficulty operating machinery, including driving a vehicle

Cannabis and driving

- Cannabis use can:
 - impair the ability to drive
 - slow reaction time, affect coordination and cause drowsiness.
 - affect judgement of distance & reaction to signals & sounds on the road.
- Impairment is significantly increased if marijuana is combined with alcohol.



Addiction Issues



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Is Cannabis Addictive?

- Physical dependence (ie. withdrawal symptoms) is not essential to being diagnosed as an addiction
- Marijuana dependence appears to be less frequent and severe than dependence on other drugs eg. alcohol or nicotine
- Regular, heavy use may lead to tolerance & over the long-term can cause dependence

Is Cannabis Addictive?

- When regular smokers quit they:
 - have more difficulty sleeping
 - increased craving
 - are more aggressive
 - are more irritable
- These symptoms rarely last more than a few days



Treatment

- Heavy users are more likely to seek treatment for problems related to their marijuana use
- People often report failed attempts to quit
- Report a loss of drive and interest in sustained activity
- Most common reason for treatment in the CAMH youth treatment population

Risks to Youth



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Adolescent Use and Risks

- Adolescence is a time for experimentation and risk taking behaviour
- Most individuals are resilient and successfully develop necessary life skills for adulthood
- For some individuals, the use of cannabis or other substances may have a negative impact on development and achievement, however, typically this is linked to wider psycho-social factors/environment.

Effects on School and Social Life

- Lower grades
- Psychological (depression and anxiety)
- Reduced ability to learn and remember information
- Reduced coping skills
- Reduced persistence



Is Cannabis a “Gateway Drug”?

- Users are more likely to use hard drugs than non-users however most users do not go on to harder drugs
- Almost all hard drug users used marijuana first but also smoked tobacco and drank alcohol
- More frequent marijuana users are more likely to use hard drugs
- There is no evidence for a causal effect (all observed associations)



Prevalence Rates



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Patterns of Use

General pattern of marijuana use:

- peaks in early adult years
- followed by a period of leveling off
- then a gradual reduction in use
- most people are light or occasional users



Canadian Addiction Survey 2004

- 44.5 % of Canadians report using cannabis at least once in lifetime
- 70% of those between 18-24 report using cannabis at least once in lifetime

Canadian Addiction Survey 2004

- 14.1% of Canadians report using cannabis at least once during the previous year
- 30% of 15-17yr olds and 47% of 18-19 yr olds have used in the past year
- Beyond age 45, less than 10% have used in the past year



2005 Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)

- 31% reported having used in their lifetime
- 26.5% of students reported using in the previous 12 months
- 15% reported using at least six times in the previous 12 months
- Males reported more frequent use than females (28% compared to 25%)

2005 OSDUS

- Use increases by grade going from 3% in grade 7 to 46% in grade 12
- 3% of all students did so daily.
- 1 in 12, or 8%, of users reported symptoms of dependence



Cannabis & Driving

- About one-in five drivers in grades 10-12 reported driving within one hour of using cannabis at least once during the past year.
- 22% of students reported that they were passengers in a vehicle driven by someone who has used cannabis prior to driving.

Current Legislation



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Current status in Canada

- Possession of marijuana remains a criminal offence
- Up to 6 months in jail or a \$1000 fine for a 1st offence.
- Up to 12 months in prison or a fine of \$2000 for subsequent offences.
- Individual has a criminal record for life.
- Up to 7 years for producing marijuana.



Outcome...

- **\$400-\$500 million** - The estimated costs of cannabis enforcement per year
- **700,000** - Canadians who have criminal records for possession of marijuana
- **77 %** of all 2001 drug-related offences in Canada involved cannabis
- **54 %** of all 2001 drug related offences were for possession of cannabis

Concerns about the system

- Being prosecuted and convicted for an offence in criminal court bears a criminal record and stigma that can have far-reaching consequences in an individual's life.
- The harm caused by a criminal conviction outweighs the harm of taking the drug.
- On the otherhand, the sentences for producing marijuana are too lenient and not an effective deterrent.

Concerns about the system

- The current law is unevenly applied. In about half the incidences where police are involved, no charge is laid eg. in large urban centers, police are less likely to charge for possession of small amounts and the accused is more likely to receive a discharge if they go to court.
- According to public opinion polls, the majority of Canadians are against incarceration for possession of small amounts of marijuana.



Does it Work?

- Possession charges use a great deal of police resources even though a small percentage of users are charged.
- There is no evidence that harsh cannabis laws deter people from using cannabis, in fact evidence points to the opposite.
- Some evidence has shown that the majority of people convicted for cannabis use continued using it

Practices in Other Countries

- Full prohibition: criminal law/enforcement of cannabis use (US, Canada, Sweden)
- De facto decriminalization: Criminal law, but diversion/discretion in CJS (Germany, Switzerland, Austria)
- De jure decriminalization: Non-criminal forms of legal control, e.g. cautions or “expiation notices” (Australia, England, Spain)
- Legalization: Consistent non-application or absence of legal control (Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland [proposed])

Cannabis Reform

Milestones in Canada



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Human Rights & Medical Use

- **August 2000** -- Ontario's Court of Appeal rules that banning marijuana for medicinal purposes violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- **July 2001** - Canada legalizes the use of marijuana by people suffering from terminal illnesses and chronic conditions



Senate Report

- **September 2002** - The Special Senate Committee on Illegal Drugs reports that marijuana is less harmful than alcohol and should be governed by the same type of regulations that control tobacco. The committee proposes to legalize personal use/production.

Special Committee on Non-Medical Use of Drugs

- **December 2002** - House of Commons committee concludes that:
 - Criminal penalties for possession of a small amount of cannabis for personal use are "disproportionate" to the potential harm associated with smoking pot.
 - Canada should decriminalize the possession and cultivation of not more than 30 grams of cannabis for personal use."

Status Quo

- **January 2003-** an Ontario judge ruled that Canada's law on possession of small amounts of marijuana was no longer valid.
- **October 2003** – A court ruling on medical marijuana effectively re-instates existing laws on possession of marijuana.



Bill C-17



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Purpose

- Emphasizes a public health approach/policy
- Reduce the expense of the criminal process
- Discourage the use of cannabis by higher rates of enforcement for possession. (net widening effect)
- Address the current differential treatment (Health Canada Website)

Bill C -17

- Under the proposals for the bill, cannabis possession and production will remain illegal in Canada under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA).
- Possession and production of small amounts, however, will be listed under the CDSA but designated as contraventions and treated under the Contraventions Act. (ie. get a ticket and no criminal record)

The Bill includes measures that:

- replace the current criminal court process and resulting criminal penalties with alternative penalties for minor **possession offences**;
- provide law enforcement officers the discretion to give a ticket or issue a summons to appear in criminal court for **possession of larger amounts**

The Bill includes measures that:

- provide for greater alternative penalties when aggravating factors are present;
- create **new offences providing tougher penalties for illegal growers and trafficking.**
- the larger the operation, the greater the penalty.

Possession Offence Summary

Offence	Adult/Youth
15 grams or less of marijuana	\$150/100
1 g or less of hash	\$300/200
As above with - aggravating factors	\$400/250
Between 15 & 30 g of marijuana – police discretion	\$300/200 or 6 months/\$1000 & criminal charge

What aggravating factors?

- While operating a motor vehicle, railway equipment, airplane or vessel
- While committing an indictable offence
- When in or near a school that is attended primarily by persons under the age of 18

Trafficking

- Current penalties for trafficking in cannabis will not change.
- Trafficking & possession for the purpose of trafficking in 3 kg. or less of hashish or marijuana is an indictable offence punishable by imprisonment for up to five years less a day.
- Over 3 kg. = up to life in prison



Marijuana Cultivation

- Currently, production of marijuana is a single offence punishable by up to 7 years of imprisonment.
- The proposed legislation will create four separate offences with penalties that better fit the seriousness of the crime



Cultivation Offence Summary

Offence	Adult/Youth
1 to 3 plants	\$500/250 -no criminal record
4 to 25 plants	\$25,000 and/or 18 months on summary conviction or up to 5 years as an indictable offence-criminal record
26 to 50 plants	up to 10 years as an indictable offence-criminal record
More than 50 plants	up to 14 years as an indictable offence-criminal record

Aggravating Factors

- In addition, cases involving more than three plants, a judge would have to provide reasons why imprisonment was not imposed where any of the following aggravating factors was found:
 - a risk of danger for children in the building where the operation exists;
 - use of traps (set to protect the premises from intruders or police);

Aggravating Factors

- use of explosives (for example, as a booby trap or to destroy evidence);
- use of land belonging to others (for example, farm land); and
- operation creating a safety hazard in a residential area

Nonpayment of Fine

- a person who does not pay the fine will not face a criminal conviction;
- a person who challenges a ticket in court, even if they are found guilty, will not face a criminal conviction;
- fines assessed in court will not be higher than those set out on the ticket;
- fines not paid will be collected according to the same provincial rules governing parking or speeding tickets.

Reporting to Parents

- The parent or guardian of anyone under 18 would be notified that the youth has received a ticket or has been charged.



Reporting to Foreign Governments

- Police are prohibited from sharing information about Canadians caught with small amounts of marijuana with authorities in the United States or other foreign governments or agencies.



Safe Schools Act (2000)

- Suspension is mandatory for:
 - possessing alcohol or illegal drugs (marijuana is still illegal)
- Expulsion is mandatory for:
 - trafficking in weapons or illegal drugs

Will decriminalization increase use?

- Numerous international studies suggest that there is no correlation between cannabis use and the severity of cannabis use penalties.
- Reducing the punitive nature of cannabis possession law and control in Canada is very unlikely to suggest to people that cannabis use is broadly tolerated or encouraged

CAMH POSITION on CANNABIS



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CAMH Position

- Some level of substance use in our society is inevitable
- Although there are health and behavioural risks, most use is sporadic
- Criminal sanctions exact a disproportionate toll on individuals relative to dangers
- Criminal sanctions not effective in controlling substance use

CAMH Position

- Support the removal of criminal sanctions for possession of small amounts of cannabis
- Redirect resources to treatment and prevention

Resources

- www.camh.net/about_addiction_mental_health/cannabis_dyk.html
- www.camh.net/public_policy/cannabis.html
- www.camh.net/news_events/osdus2005_highlights.html
- www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/pubs/drugs-droques/straight_talk-parlons_franchement/index_e.html
- www.potanddriving.cpha.ca
- http://ottawa.ca/residents/health/living/ad_youth/drive_high_en.html