



Cannabis gummies like 'a glass of wine with dinner' for a growing number of Australians

Follow our Australia news live blog for latest updates

Get our [morning and afternoon news emails](#), [free app](#) or [daily news podcast](#)

Sun 21 Jul 2024 06.34 AEST

Ruth started taking cannabis gummies two years ago, “in a similar way to people having a glass of wine with dinner or a beer after work”.

“I use them if I just want a fun afternoon or evening to relax, by myself or with friends,” she says, and unlike alcohol, “I don’t have a hangover in the morning.”

The 30-year-old, who asked that her surname not be published, works in marketing and has never enjoyed alcohol, which she says makes her feel “awful and tired”. She finds clubs and pubs too busy and expensive, and prefers to spend her weekends at

home painting, sculpting, crafting, listening to music or watching television - often under the influence of a gummy.

“The worst thing that’s ever happened is I laugh too hard at episodes of Parks and Rec or silly YouTube videos. Sometimes I become very motivated and energised and start deep cleaning my house.”

Ruth is among the rising number of Australians taking cannabis recreationally in gummy form, which is fast becoming a preferred form of consumption to smoking, and for many an alternative to alcohol.

Cannabis gummies look just like the gelatin-based candy and often assume the popular bear-shaped form. Most of the time they contain both cannabidiol (CBD), the nonintoxicating component derived from cannabis known for its medicinal properties, as well as THC, the psychoactive component which produces the high.

John Ryan, the CEO of the Penington Institute, a research organisation that promotes harm reduction approaches to drug use, says it’s hard to know exactly what’s happening in an illegal underground market but there are “certainly lots of anecdotal reports of increased consumption of gummies”.



📷 People who buy cannabis gummies illegally don't know the dose they're taking, experts say. Photograph: jirkajc/Getty Images

A spokesperson for the drugs regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), said “in most states and territories in Australia, it is illegal to use, possess, cultivate or sell recreational cannabis”.

Most medicinal cannabis products doctors are [allowed to prescribe](#) on a case-by-case basis for therapeutic purposes are considered unapproved medicines because they have undergone little or no evaluation by the TGA for quality, safety, efficacy or performance, the spokesperson said.

No gummies are approved by the TGA.

Big increase in the US

In the illicit market where most people turn to use gummies recreationally, the concentration is most likely low in CBD and high in THC, Ryan says.

He says cannabis gummies have become a “fashionable new frontier” for drug use in Australia. “We’ve seen in the US a very big increase in [gummy consumption](#), and that’s leaking into the Australian culture.”

Cannabis [gummies overtook smoking](#) cannabis in popularity in the US in 2023, according to a survey by research firm BDSA, while a Forbes health [survey earlier this year](#) found gummies and other edibles were the most popular form of consuming cannabis.

[Sign up for Guardian Australia’s free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup](#)

Mushroom gummies infused with hemp (a low THC cannabis plant), manufactured in the US and distributed by Australian brand Uncle Frog’s, made headlines recently when [two flavours were recalled](#) after several people were hospitalised. The [investigation is ongoing](#).

Prof Jon Wardle, the director of the national centre for naturopathic medicine at Southern Cross University, says certain mushrooms – such as lion’s mane – are [used as nootropics, often with psychoactive drugs](#) such as cannabis or psychedelics, to enhance the effects of those drugs. Because mushroom gummies are not quite medicine, not quite food, Wardle says the products are prone to [fall through the regulatory cracks](#).

Ryan warns that people who buy gummies in the illicit market often don’t know what they’re taking. There is “a very significant risk” those people ingest gummies that contain a psychoactive substance, he says. “It’s an easy mistake.”

Even for those who knowingly take cannabis gummies, any product bought illicitly means people don’t know the dose they’re taking, Ryan says. That’s especially the case if people are used to smoking cannabis, he says, because the effect from inhaling is much more quickly felt, whereas eating is one of the slowest forms of administration.

“One of the really simple mistakes that people make is thinking they’re not getting any impact and eating more gummies, and then the onset of intoxication does arrive

and it's much more than they had been planning on because they've doubled or tripled their dose," he says.

Ryan says the situation with gummies "exposes how much worse off we are" with an unregulated cannabis market. He calls it "a wild west problem".

Sign up to **Afternoon Update**

Free daily newsletter

Our Australian afternoon update breaks down the key stories of the day, telling you what's happening and why it matters

Enter your email address

Sign up

Privacy Notice: Newsletters may contain info about charities, online ads, and content funded by outside parties. For more information see our [Privacy Policy](#). We use Google reCaptcha to protect our website and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

Effects are variable

David* consumes gummies but admits he has no idea about dosage.

"Say you buy a pack of 10 gummies," the 26-year-old tells Guardian Australia. "The first time you ... certainly just have one. Depending how strong that is, the next time you have half, one, two, whatever it is. You just start off with one so you don't get too fucked up."

David says he can better control the effects of cannabis if he smokes it. He says gummies have a stronger effect and he only takes edibles when he has a whole day clear ahead. However, Mary* says the opposite. As a parent she takes a gummy because she doesn't want to get too high.

David says the effects of gummies are variable. He recalls one batch that made him and his friends really energetic: "We took them and ended up cleaning the house and wanted to go for a run outside." Other gummies have left him unable to get off the couch.

Linda, 47, says she prefers gummies to smoking as she hates the smell of smoked cannabis. Morgan*, in her late 50s, says she started off smoking cannabis but switched to gummies five years ago because she wasn't keen on inhaling smoke.

Ryan believes part of their popularity is due to the culture of non-smoking in Australia over the last 30 years.

Dr Llew Mills, a drug and alcohol researcher with the University of Sydney, says "at the moment there is no empirical evidence for the effectiveness of cannabis for treating anxiety or indeed any mental health condition".

Mills also highlights anxiety is a symptom of cannabis withdrawal, “so when people use cannabis to treat their anxiety they may simply be using cannabis to treat a symptom of their cannabis withdrawal”.

However, taken non-medically, he says the healthiness of taking weed gummies could be considered “very similar” to wine.

“Cannabis helps people relax, laugh and heightens the experience of fun things like art and sex. These things can definitely improve one’s enjoyment of life. But, once again, let’s not confuse taking a drug to relax and taking it to treat a medical condition.



📷 Peter* says he has given up alcohol since taking gummies and feels 'a lot calmer'. Photograph: Olivka888/Getty Images

“No reputable doctor would ever prescribe alcohol for anxiety, and that’s because firstly it is addictive, and secondly there are drugs that have been designed specifically to treat anxiety that work much better,” he says.

The peak body for doctors, the Australian Medical Association, **does not support cannabis’s legalisation for recreational use**. The association highlights the poor mental health outcomes from cannabis use, including anxiety, panic attacks, paranoia, memory loss and an increased incidence of schizophrenia, as well as physical ill-health conditions such as bronchitis or cancer, cardiovascular system damage and impaired reaction time and brain function.

* Names changed for privacy.

In Australia, the [National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline](#) is at 1800 250 015; families and friends can seek help at [Family Drug Support Australia](#) at 1300 368 186.

An earlier version of this article was first published on 13 July 2024; it was republished on 21 July 2024 following editing revisions.

Paid content About ▾

Visit The USA: The United States of Adventure



Most viewed

