

**ACT**
Government

Health

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Cannabis and your health

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From 31 January 2020 the [rules around personal use of cannabis \(http://www.act.gov.au/cannabis\)](http://www.act.gov.au/cannabis) in the ACT have changed - but the negative effects of cannabis have not.

Be informed about the health impacts of using cannabis.

Not all cannabis products are the same. You cannot assume that one form of cannabis will have the same effects as another form.

If you need or want support to stop or change your cannabis use, [support services \(https://www.health.act.gov.au/services/alcohol-and-drug-services\)](https://www.health.act.gov.au/services/alcohol-and-drug-services) are available.

If you or someone you know is having a bad reaction to cannabis (or any other drug/alcohol), call triple zero (000). Emergency services are here to help, not get you in trouble.

Cannabis and your mental health

The immediate impacts on your mental health can include:

- reduced brain function (not thinking clearly)
- anxiety or panic attacks
- paranoia
- memory loss.

Frequent and long-term cannabis use can reduce your brain function and negatively affect your mental health. It can also make you more likely to experience psychoses, or even develop schizophrenia.

Psychotic symptoms include:

- developing unusual beliefs and paranoia (delusions)
- seeing or hearing things that do not exist or are distorted (hallucinations).

Cannabis and your physical health

Cannabis is unpredictable and affects everyone differently.

Some people, such as new users, can experience very unpleasant reactions to cannabis, such as hallucinations and panic attacks.

The immediate impacts on your physical health can include:

- slower reactions
- bloodshot eyes
- increased heart rate.

People who smoke cannabis are also more likely to experience damage to their throat and lungs, and experience ongoing health impacts such as bronchitis.

Regular and long-term cannabis use can reduce your brain function.

Cannabis reduces your ability to drive a vehicle. It is particularly dangerous for driving if it is combined with other substances, such as alcohol.

People under 18 years

If you're under the age of 18, it is still illegal and unsafe to use cannabis.

As a teenager, your brain is still developing, so the earlier you start using cannabis, the more likely you are to experience problems later.

Every body is different. Your size, weight, health, and the amount or potency of cannabis changes how it affects you.

Smoking cannabis can cloud your memory, slow your reactions and even change the way your brain works.

Friends look out for each other—don't encourage or pressure your friends to use cannabis.

Pregnant women and children

Legislation requires adults to store cannabis out of reach of children, and it is illegal to smoke cannabis near children.

Children who accidentally eat cannabis can be poisoned. If you suspect a child has eaten cannabis, call the Poisons Information Service on 13 11 26 immediately. In an emergency, always call triple 0 (000).

Smoking cannabis during pregnancy is linked to lower birth weight of babies, which is associated with problems later in a person's life.

Second-hand smoke can damage someone's health. Never smoke around children (anyone under 18 years old), pregnant women, or anyone who doesn't want to be exposed to cannabis smoke.

Mixing substances

Mixing substances can put you in a very vulnerable state since drugs, alcohol and medicines can interact with each other in unpredictable or unexpected ways.

Smoking or eating plant-based cannabis does not directly cause death by overdose, but it is regularly detected in the blood of people who have died from overdoses when it has been used at the same time as other drugs. Cannabis, when mixed with other substances, may contribute to overdose deaths by its anti-vomiting effects.

Addiction and withdrawal

Cannabis can be addictive and therefore difficult to quit.

When you choose to give up cannabis your body goes through withdrawal and must re-learn how to function without the drug in your system.

Withdrawal symptoms include:

- anxiety
- irritability
- loss of appetite
- difficulty sleeping.

Being addicted to any substance can have a strong negative impact on your friendships and family relationships.

Support services

Sometimes people who use alcohol or drugs need more than just the support of friends and family.

There are many health support services available to people who want to change the way they use, or stop using, cannabis. Drug services are here to provide confidential support and assistance, not to get anyone in trouble.

Speaking with your health professional can be a good place to start. If you don't already know a health professional you can [find a health service \(https://www.health.act.gov.au/services-and-programs/find-health-service\)](https://www.health.act.gov.au/services-and-programs/find-health-service) in Canberra.

The Canberra Health Services [Alcohol and Drug Service \(https://www.health.act.gov.au/services/alcohol-and-drug-services\)](https://www.health.act.gov.au/services/alcohol-and-drug-services) provides information, advice, referral, assessment and support 24 hours a day. The service is available to all residents of the ACT—for people affected directly or indirectly by drug or alcohol use.

The service is available to any ACT resident who thinks they, or someone they know, needs support with an alcohol or drug problem.

Contact the Alcohol and Drug Service on [\(02\) 5124 9977 \(tel:0251249977\)](tel:0251249977) or [\(02\) 5124 1580 \(tel:0251241580\)](tel:0251241580).

ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association (ATODA) [website \(https://www.atoda.org.au/\)](https://www.atoda.org.au/) also has a number of services available via their [online service directory \(https://directory.atoda.org.au/\)](https://directory.atoda.org.au/).

In an emergency always call triple zero (000).

Supporting a family member or friend

People who experience problems as a result of using cannabis (or other drugs or alcohol) need the support of their friends and family. But we know supporting someone with drug use can be tough.

The Canberra Health Services Alcohol and Drug Service (<https://www.health.act.gov.au/services/alcohol-and-drug-services>) also supports the family and friends of people who have drug related problems.

If you can, encourage people you know who have problems with cannabis to get in contact with support services. Let them know support services are confidential and are not concerned with the legal status of the drug.

Parents who are looking for information on drug use might also find the [Positive Choices Booklet \(https://positivechoices.org.au/pdf/drug-education-booklets/Drug%20Education%20Parent%20Booklet/index.html\)](https://positivechoices.org.au/pdf/drug-education-booklets/Drug%20Education%20Parent%20Booklet/index.html) helpful.

More resources and information are listed below.

Medicinal cannabis

Medicinal cannabis is a pharmaceutical product in Australia. It is not the same as the cannabis plant.

If you need advice about accessing medicinal cannabis, speak with your health practitioner about whether it is suitable for your condition.

For information about the ACT medicinal cannabis scheme, visit our [medicinal cannabis webpage \(https://www.health.act.gov.au/health-professionals/pharmaceutical-services/controlled-medicines/medicinal-cannabis\)](https://www.health.act.gov.au/health-professionals/pharmaceutical-services/controlled-medicines/medicinal-cannabis).

Resources and information

- World Health Organization [cannabis web page \(https://www.who.int/substance_abuse/facts/cannabis/en/\)](https://www.who.int/substance_abuse/facts/cannabis/en/)
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [cannabis web page \(https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/drug-types/cannabis\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/drug-types/cannabis)
- Positive Choices website (<https://positivechoices.org.au/pdf/drug-education-booklets/Drug%20Education%20Parent%20Booklet/index.html>)
 - [Factsheet for teachers \(https://positivechoices.org.au/teachers/cannabis-factsheet\)](https://positivechoices.org.au/teachers/cannabis-factsheet)

- [Drug education booklet for parents \(https://positivechoices.org.au/pdf/drug-education-booklets/Drug%20Education%20Parent%20Booklet/index.html\)](https://positivechoices.org.au/pdf/drug-education-booklets/Drug%20Education%20Parent%20Booklet/index.html)
- ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association (ATODA) [website \(https://www.atoda.org.au/\)](https://www.atoda.org.au/).

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