

## What is cannabis?

Cannabis is a herbal substance with two main active ingredients, Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD).

THC is the chemical that gets you high. THC changes the amounts of pleasure in the brain but can also provoke a 'fight or flight' response leading to anxiety.

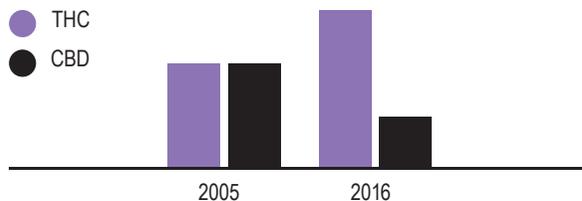
CBD works on the pain and mood management areas of the brain. It can balance out some of the harsher sides of THC. This doesn't make it completely safe.



## Is cannabis getting stronger?

High potency police seizures of cannabis have increased. In 2005 51% of cannabis seized was high potency, this increased to 94% in 2016.

The THC to CBD ratio has also changed. According to the same report, in 2005 it used to be 1:1, now it is 3:1, 3 times more THC than CBD. This means that it can have a bigger impact on people's mental health.



## Physical effects include:

Bloodshot eyes, relaxed and expanded airways, an increased heart rate and a drop in blood pressure. Using cannabis can cause nausea and vomiting, especially in those who are not used to it.

Cannabis can impair your response times, making it unsafe to drive, ride a push bike or operate any machinery. This is why the police and many workplaces now test for cannabis.



## Getting help

County Durham Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service can provide confidential, non-judgemental advice and support to help you make changes to your cannabis use.

03000 266666



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[www.codurhamdrugalcoholrecovery.co.uk](http://www.codurhamdrugalcoholrecovery.co.uk)

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## Short term mental health effects include:



“High”, relaxed (with lower THC levels), more intense colours, increased enjoyment of music, happiness, sleepiness.



Cannabis with higher THC content can produce anxiety. Your mood and circumstance can mean that you could also experience confusion, hallucination and/or paranoia.

Some users can have severe negative symptoms such as hearing voices, seeing things that aren't there or having strange unsettling thoughts or beliefs. You may need immediate help if you are experiencing this.

## Long term mental health effects include:

- Irreversible effects on the brain's ability to process information and memory.
- Reduced motivation (harder to get out of the house, get to work, etc.).
- Symptoms of depression.
- Sleep-disorders, over time cannabis can disturb sleep patterns.

A 2018 study by Kings College London found: “regular users of high-potency cannabis carry the highest risk for psychotic disorders, compared to those who have never used cannabis”.

If you have had symptoms of mental health issues using any mind-altering substance increases your risk of a related negative experience in the short and long term.

## Is cannabis addictive?

Yes, it is. For years it was thought that cannabis had little to no potential to be addictive, however recent research suggests it is. You can develop a tolerance (meaning taking more to get the same effect). You can also experience physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms. Addiction or dependency doesn't happen suddenly – a behaviour becomes a habit forming and the physical need then develops over time.

Source: “Cannabis and mental health”  
Royal College of Psychiatrists website  
[RCPsych.ac.uk/Healthadvice/ProblemsAndDisorders/Cannabis.aspx](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/Healthadvice/ProblemsAndDisorders/Cannabis.aspx)

## When should I consider changing my cannabis use?

- If you are starting to feel anxious or irritable when you know you will not be able to use cannabis.
- If you are relying on cannabis to relax or sleep several times a week.
- If you think about having a smoke whenever you are in a certain place, and/or thinking about when that next smoke will be.
- If you are noticing a pattern or a feeling of enjoyment from the ritual of smoking – rolling or preparing your cannabis, then this can be a sign that you are developing a habit.
- If people are expressing concern about your mood or how cannabis is affecting other areas of your life (work, relationships, finances).

## Tips for reducing or keeping in control

- Take a break. Taking a few days, weeks or a month off will help towards keeping a habit from forming.
- Leave your days free from cannabis. You'll get more stuff done and want less cannabis in the evenings.
- Set limits on the amount you use. Setting a limit on how much you use might help keep your use under control. It also means you might get other stuff done.

## Tips for stopping

- If you want to stop – set a stop date, tell someone you trust that this is your plan and ask them to help you.
- Be prepared – long-term use of cannabis can mean when you stop you might have some withdrawal symptoms
- The irritability, anxiety and problems with sleeping usually appear 10 hours after the last joint, and peak at around one week after the last use of the drug.
- Tobacco mixed with cannabis can make it harder to stop. Get support to stop smoking if you think this will be a problem.
- Recognise that lapsing isn't failing. If you do lapse learn from it – why did you lapse and what can you do differently next time. Keep trying – it doesn't always happen first time.