

Myth 1 - Cannabis is harmless

What is cannabis?



- Cannabis is the most widely produced (illicit) drug worldwide¹.
- Between 2.7 and 4.9 per cent of the global population were estimated to have been using cannabis in 2012²
- Cannabis has street names such as: Grass, Hash, Herb, Pot, Weed, ...³
- 400 chemicals can be found in the cannabis plant, and THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) is the active ingredient, which affects your brain the most^{1 4}.

What is the effect of cannabis use on brain?

- Cannabis affects your brain directly⁴.
- Cannabis use can lead to problems with thinking and problem solving; it is linked to deficits in memory, attention, reaction time, information processing and learning⁵.
- The use of Cannabis increases the risk of a series of attitude and personal changes, anxiety and depression¹.
- Among people who used Cannabis regularly before age 18, but then stopped the use, a reduce in IQ by 8 was observed by age 38 – 20 years after the use!⁴

Does cannabis use harm my health?

- Cannabis use is associated with a variety of health and other harms, especially amongst regular long-term users^{1 2 4}.
- For example, the use of Cannabis increases the risk of lung problems, chronic cough and bronchitis¹.
- THC content and the potency of cannabis have been increasing over the past 30 years, which causes users develop heightened responses as well as adverse effects to the drug¹.
- Effects on the body can last up to 28 days after abstinence from the drug.¹

¹ UNODC Discussion Paper. Cannabis: a short review, available at http://www.unodc.org/documents/drug-prevention-and-treatment/cannabis_review.pdf

² UNODC World Drug Report 2014, available at <http://www.unodc.org/wdr>.

³ <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/marijuana>

⁴ http://www.mentorfoundation.org/uploads/Adolescent_Brain_Notes.pdf

Can I become addicted to marijuana?

- Long-term cannabis use can lead to tolerance to the effects of THC as well as addiction¹.
- It is estimated that 1 in 9 cannabis users overall will become dependent⁴.
- Users who try to quit experience withdrawal symptoms⁴.
- More people using cannabis are seeking treatment for drug use related disorders each year.¹

Many people use cannabis during the teenage years – it must be harmless?

- The adolescent brain is not fully developed until the mid-20s and developing brains are much more vulnerable to all negative effects of cannabis use.^{1 4 5 6}
- Important cognitive functions, resulting in skills such as regulating your emotions, making decisions, solving problems and abstract thinking, may not mature if this delicate development process is disrupted by drug use.^{1 6}
- Early initiation and intense use during teen age years increases the risk of dependence.^{1 4 6}
- The likelihood to become addicted if anyone begins using cannabis in adolescence almost doubles (1 out of 6 instead 1 out of 10)¹.
- Early initiation and use during teen age years is also associated with problems in psychosocial development, mental health and poorer cognitive performance.¹

Get more facts:

<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/marijuana> → NIDA for teens portal gives you a comprehensive overview on Marijuana: what it is, how it is used, how it looks like and on short- and long-term effects on your body

http://www.unodc.org/documents/drug-prevention-and-treatment/cannabis_review.pdf → UNODC discussion paper on cannabis use, function and prevalence, effects on body and brain, addiction, reasons in cannabis use, best practices in cannabis prevention and treatment

http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2014/Cannabis_2014_web.pdf → the UNDOC Word Drug Report 2014 provides you with an overview on cannabis cultivation and production, a market analysis on the risk and harm in consumer markets as well as on cannabis supply and changes in policies

<http://preventionhub.org/training/adolescent-brain> → presentation on adolescent brain development and how drugs can affect everyone's brain

<http://www.drugfoundation.org.nz/matters-of-substance/november-2013> → articles on the difference of cannabis 30 years ago, on medical marijuana, on synthetic cannabis, on harmful effects of cannabis and on cannabis and driving

⁵ http://www.mentorfoundation.org/uploads/Adolescent_Brain_Notes.pdf

⁶ Meier et al. Persistent cannabis users show neuropsychological decline from childhood to midlife. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2012 Oct 2;109(40).