

Teens & Cannabis



Québec  
 

Produced by the Service de toxicomanie of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, in conjunction with:

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Cannabis

Adolescence is a time when you look for adventure, discovery and enjoyment. You want to have fun with your friends and try out new experiences: this is often when you are faced with choices, one of which is whether to use cannabis. Like alcohol, cannabis is often associated with partying. However, there is a big difference between the two: possession of cannabis is illegal, even when you are over 18.

Contrary to what many people think, there are more teens who do not use cannabis than there are who do. Although some teens want to smoke pot out of curiosity or to be like their friends, there are other ways of being cool. There are lots of stimulating things you can get involved in, like sports, the arts or new hobbies.

In Quebec like everywhere else, more and more teens are trying out cannabis. For most of them, using cannabis is not a problem because it does not go beyond exploration or occasional use. However, for some teens, cannabis, like alcohol, becomes more and more important. They start by using it for fun, but it gradually occupies more and more of their thoughts. Any occasion can provide a pretext for using it. For these teens, cannabis can affect their relationships with their parents and friends, their school life and their health. In addition, since using cannabis is against the law, their habit may have legal consequences.

To make an enlightened choice regarding cannabis, you need to be well informed. The purpose of this brochure is to give you the facts about cannabis.

Some Background

Cannabis sativa has been used by humans for thousands of years. Its use spread with the movement of populations. Over the centuries, the plant has served many different purposes: as a medication, in religious rites and for the textile quality of its fibres used in ropes, sails and clothing. In North America, people only started using cannabis for recreational purposes in the 20th century.

What Is Cannabis?

Cannabis comes in three forms: marijuana, hashish and hash oil.

To begin with, you should know that the THC content of cannabis products has increased in the last few years. THC is the substance that has an effect on the user. Its full name is Delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol, so you can see why we use the abbreviation! The increase in THC is mainly due to new growing methods like hydroponics, aeroponics and genetic cross-breeding. The higher the THC content, the more potent the effect.



Marijuana

Marijuana is also known as pot, cannabis, grass, buzz, ganja or weed. It is made from the plant's flowering tops and flowers, known as "bud." Its colour varies from greyish-green to greenish-brown. People smoke it in a pipe or as a hand-rolled cigarette also known as a joint or reefer. The smoke gives off a strong smell.

Marijuana can also be added to certain foods, like muffins and cakes.

Hashish

Hashish, also called hash, cube, dime, bag, chocolate or gram, is the dried viscous resin of the cannabis plant and can be beige, brown or black. It is sold in small, solid pieces. Hashish can be heated on knives, for example, but is usually crumbled and smoked like marijuana. Like marijuana, it can also be added to various foods.

Hash Oil

This thick oil has various names such as resin, liquid hash and honey oil, and is black, dark green, reddish brown or yellow. It is extracted from the cannabis plant and is usually wiped onto a cigarette or rubbed into tobacco and smoked. Because it contains higher levels of THC, hash oil is far more potent than other cannabis products.

You can never rely on the quality and exact composition of cannabis and its derivatives bought on the black market.

The Law of Effect (E = PIC)

It is hard to predict just what effect a drug will have on a particular person. Like all drugs, cannabis can have different effects depending on the product, the individual and the context. This is what is known as the law of effect (E = PIC).

For example, someone using cannabis for the first time will not feel the same effects as someone who uses it every day, even if the amount and quality are identical. The effect of cannabis can also be influenced by the person's feelings while they are using it and by the context. So if someone uses it at a party, the effect on them may be different from when they use it at school.

These are a few factors that influence the effects of cannabis:

The product:

- Amount
- Quality
- Frequency of use
- Tolerance to the product
- Combination with other products
- Etc.

The individual:

- Height
- Gender
- Weight
- Health
- State of mind
- Etc.

The context:

- Setting
- Time of day
- Relationships (with family, friends)
- Conflicts
- Etc.

Physical Effects of Cannabis

Like any drug, cannabis affects your brain. It modifies the communications between nerve cells and interferes with your senses.

The main physical effects of using cannabis are:



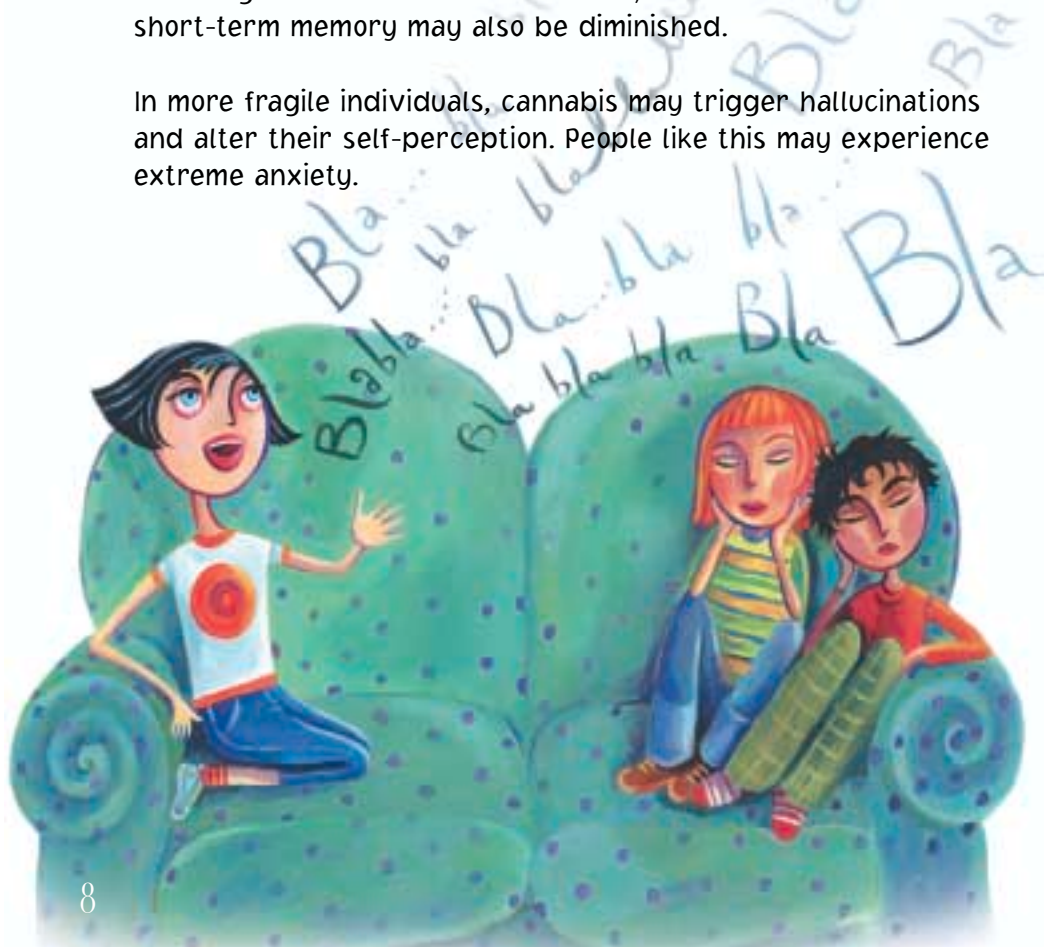
- Accelerated heartbeat;
- Impaired coordination of movements and balance;
- Increase in appetite;
- Dry mouth and throat;
- Swelling of blood vessels (red eyes);
- Drowsiness.

Using cannabis can also affect your respiratory system. A joint of cannabis yields 50% more tar than a regular cigarette. And because the smoke is often deeply inhaled, a single joint can do as much damage to your lungs as 4 to 10 cigarettes

Psychological Effects of Cannabis

Using cannabis also has psychological effects. Someone smoking cannabis may have sense of well-being and feel calm and relaxed. They may also be more talkative than usual or laugh spontaneously. Because cannabis affects the senses of the person using it, their perception of time and space may be skewed and sensory perception may be altered (colours look brighter and sounds are clearer). Concentration and short-term memory may also be diminished.

In more fragile individuals, cannabis may trigger hallucinations and alter their self-perception. People like this may experience extreme anxiety.



Watch out for combinations!

Using different drugs at once is an enormous risk because you cannot know what will happen. Often effects are multiplied and intensified. In other words, drugs are more dangerous when you mix them. If you take several drugs at once, you are also more likely to impair your ability to drive. For example, mixing marijuana or hashish with alcohol can make you confused.

Abusive and Repeated Use of Cannabis

Like any behaviour associated with pleasure, relaxation and escaping from reality, using cannabis can lead to psychological dependence. When cannabis becomes increasingly important in a person's life, they tend to use it as their only way of responding to their needs. They may have trouble doing without it. Once it becomes a habit, it may seem hard to stop or cut down.

A user's attention and thoughts can become constantly focused on the effects of cannabis and their need to take it again. They may have trouble concentrating, be more irritable and anxious, and have trouble sleeping and facing reality. It may take time to get used to living without cannabis. But talking about it and seeking help and support can make it easier.

When it comes to physical dependence, the experts agree that dependence on cannabis is mild. The physical symptoms of withdrawal are very rare.

Long Term

In the long term, excessive and regular use of cannabis can reduce your motivation and level of interest, and cause memory and concentration problems. These side effects may linger for a few months after you stop using it.

Remember: excessive use of cannabis on a regular basis sometimes masks personal problems.



Having a Problem with Cannabis Use

It is not always easy to recognize that you have a problem with cannabis. However, there are signs that indicate you are no longer using it for pleasure alone. Here are some examples:

- My favourite activities are boring when I haven't smoked.
- I smoke even before doing something important (going to school, taking a music class, playing sports).
- I choose my activities and friends based on whether or not I will be able to smoke.
- I need to smoke more cannabis to achieve the same effect as before (higher tolerance to the product).
- I smoke cannabis so that I can face my problems or feelings.
- I need cannabis to make me feel better.

As with any drug, if you have a cannabis problem, you are not in control of your life because the substance has become too important to you and is preventing you from achieving your goals.

Some people may think it has advantages... but there are drawbacks too

Emotions

With cannabis, you may tend to forget about your problems, forget your inhibitions and disappointments, and feel less stressed.

But...

It is only an escape from reality. As soon as you come down, you find you are still the same person, with your strengths as well as your weaknesses. Your problems may even have become worse.

Personality

Smoking cannabis, especially with friends, may make you feel cooler, older, and more self-assured.

But...

Being cool is all about asserting yourself, being comfortable with who you are, and having all sorts of passions and interests.

Creativity

Cannabis may open your mind and make you feel more creative and imaginative...

But...

Imagination and creativity are really part of who you are and come from your own head, not from the substance.

Choosing not to Use It

This is a big decision because it has all sorts of repercussions affecting the individual's

- health;
- relationships with family, friends, and boyfriends or girlfriends;
- physical and intellectual capacity;
- financial situation;
- legal aspect;
- studies.

The thing to remember is that before you smoked pot, you had other ways of enjoying yourself!



Cannabis and the Law

Since 1997, the importing, production, distribution and possession of cannabis has been regulated by the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (Statute of Canada, 1996, c. 19). This act sets out the related offences and punishments. However, the act gives a lot of power to judges when it comes to sentencing. They can take into account “aggravating” circumstances, like the fact that the person has sold drugs to children, hired adolescents under 18 to commit offences, or sold drugs in a schoolyard or other place frequented by youth.

For cannabis, the maximum sentences provided by the act for the various offences are as follows:

Production (manufacturing and growing)
Maximum of 7 years imprisonment.

Importing and exporting
Maximum of imprisonment for life.

Possession for the purpose of trafficking and trafficking
Imprisonment for life if the amount exceeds 3 kilos, and 5 years if it is under 3 kilos.

Simple possession
Maximum of 5 years if the amount exceed 30 grams for cannabis and one gram for cannabis resin. A maximum fine of \$1,000 or 6 months in prison for smaller amounts.

For individuals aged under 18, cannabis-related offences come under the *Young Offenders Act* (Statute of Canada, R.S. 1985, Chapter Y-1). The consequences vary according to the offences. They may involve alternative measures, community service, fines, custody of various durations and a criminal record.

If you have a criminal record, you may not be allowed to travel outside Canada. For a person under 18, this restriction remains in force for five years after the person is convicted. So if you commit an offence when you are 17, you have a criminal record until you are 22. Most people think the record is completely erased after five years, but this is simply not true. The information in it may not be used against the person if they re-offend, or during the selection process for a job, but it does remain in their record.



Use of Cannabis for Therapeutic Purposes



Since 2001, certain people have been legally authorized to use cannabis for therapeutic or medical purposes. For these people, cannabis relieves intense physical pain that was not alleviated by any of the various medications they were previously prescribed.

This applies to cancer and AIDS patients. Cannabis is prescribed to relieve nausea and vomiting, stimulate the appetite and promote weight gain. It is also very effective in alleviating the pain of multiple sclerosis, chronic pain and intense migraines, and in reducing the frequency of seizures in epilepsy patients.

The authorization to possess cannabis for medical purposes is granted by Health Canada. Applications must include a doctor's declaration in the case of life-threatening illnesses and a declaration by a specialist physician for recognized diseases such as epilepsy and multiple sclerosis. Other more stringent provisions apply for health problems not recognized by Health Canada.



Cannabis and Driving

Impaired driving is an offence under the Criminal Code. Like alcohol, cannabis affects your ability to drive a vehicle. It reduces your motor coordination and disrupts your ability to follow a straight line and concentrate. A high dose of cannabis, or cannabis combined with alcohol or other drugs, increases the risk of road accidents.

Questions?

Are teenagers more likely than adults to become dependent on drugs?

Yes. Drug dependence has been found to develop much faster in adolescents than in adults because their personality is still developing. Adolescence is marked by all sorts of major changes: physical, psychological and social. These upheavals create a lot of insecurity in some teenagers. Sometimes they are tempted to escape from the problems associated with these changes by using drugs.

Is it legal to possess a marijuana plant at home?

It is illegal for anyone to grow even one cannabis plant at home. Growing cannabis is a criminal offence.

Can a natural drug be harmful?

Using any drug inappropriately, whether or not it is natural, has damaging consequences.

Can you overdose on cannabis?

You cannot overdose on cannabis alone. An overdose is caused by respiratory arrest (you stop breathing), which cannot happen with cannabis use.

How long does cannabis stay in the body?

Any natural substance that we drink, eat or smoke remains in our body for a certain time, is involved in our metabolism and then excreted; while being transformed, these substances are called metabolites. Through its metabolites, cannabis can be detected in your body for up to three weeks after you have used it.

Are there any tricks for giving up cannabis?

There is no magic formula for giving it up but there are ways of modifying the behaviours associated with cannabis use:

- Get rid of all the items connected with use.
- Change your habits.
- Find new leisure interests.
- Spend more time with friends who don't use it.
- Set yourself realistic goals.
- Reward yourself with the money you would have spent on using it.
- Tell the people close to you about your decision (family, friends).
- Ask for help.



Do you have a problem with cannabis?

Talk it over with someone you trust: a family member, friend, teacher, social worker, school psychologist, nurse, instructor, counsellor, etc.

If you need help or information, you can also call:

Drugs Help and Referral

Montreal and region: (514) 527-2626

Outside Montreal: 1 (800) 265-2626

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Tel-Jeunes

Montreal and region: (514) 288-2266

Outside Montreal: 1 (800) 263-2266

Free, confidential service

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Quebec also has specialized help and support services for adolescents who have a cannabis problem. To find out more about these services, contact your local CLSC.



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