

KNOW IT Marijuana, pot, draw, blow, weed, puff, shit, ganja, hash, rocky, skunk, oil

Cannabis is a natural substance from a plant commonly called 'Cannabis sativa'.

It comes in a solid, dark lump known as 'resin', or as crushed flower heads and small leaves (sometimes with stalks and seeds) called 'grass', or as a sticky oil.

It can be rolled with tobacco in a spliff or joint, smoked on its own in a special pipe or cooked with and eaten.

There are different strengths of cannabis – some, such as skunk, are very strong.

THE LAW Cannabis is a Class B drug, but Class A penalties can apply to cannabis oil.

The maximum penalty possession of a Class B drug is five years in prison and/or a fine.

The maximum penalty for supply (selling or giving to another person) is 14 years in prison and/or a fine.

A drugs record can cause serious problems at home and school, and could affect job prospects.

If you have a drugs record, it can be difficult to get a visa to travel to some countries.

The information given here is general. If specific legal advice is required, please consult a solicitor.

EFFECTS Getting 'stoned' on cannabis makes most users relaxed and talkative. It heightens the senses, especially when it comes to colours, taste and music.

Cooking and eating hash makes the effects more intense and harder to control.

Hash may bring on cravings for certain kinds of food. This is often called having the 'munchies'.

Cannabis lodges in the fatty tissues of the body, so it can be detected long after it was last used.

Cannabis traces are detectable in the urine for up to three weeks in heavy regular users and in the hair for much longer.

RISKS

When stoned, the user's eyes become red and the heart beats faster.

It can make users paranoid and anxious, depending on their mood and situation.

Mixing cannabis with tobacco and smoking it damages the airways and lungs and can lead to users getting hooked on tobacco.

Inhaling deeply and holding the smoke in, or sucking on a bong or water pipe, increases the amount of tar and other dangerous chemicals which stick to lung tissue.

Smoking cannabis over a long period of time can increase the risk of respiratory disorders, including lung cancer.

Plastic bottles, rubber hoses, PVC, aluminium drinks cans or tinfoil, should not be used to smoke cannabis. These all give off toxic fumes when hot.

Some infections, such as hepatitis, can be passed on if several people are sharing the same joint.

Cannabis affects the short-term memory and ability to concentrate and make judgements.

The user may also be affected by cannabis the next day, and it may be more difficult to perform important tasks that require a clear

head or sharp reactions.

Getting stoned affects co-ordination, increasing the risk of accidents. It impairs driving skills, so never get into a car driven by someone who is stoned.

If cannabis is used with alcohol the risk of becoming ill is increased.

Users should not use cannabis around others who may be affected by the smoke, particularly children. Low levels of cannabis have been found in the urine of young children.