



cannabis dependence

Although cannabis was once seen as a 'soft drug', it is now recognised as a drug of dependence, or a drug which is hard to stop once you use it enough, and which you need more and more of to have the same effect.

what is cannabis dependence?

Cannabis dependence is when someone needs cannabis to function normally. People who experience at least three of the following in one year would be diagnosed as cannabis dependent:

- using larger amounts and using for longer periods
- feeling the need to use and/or unable to control use
- spending lots of time getting, using and recovering from cannabis
- giving up or reducing activities that are important or enjoyable
- continuing to use the drug despite having problems
- tolerance (needing more cannabis to get the same effect)
- withdrawal (uncomfortable/unpleasant symptoms) when stopping cannabis

cannabis and withdrawal

People who have been using cannabis heavily for a while may experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop. Some may feel so uncomfortable they start using again.

the most common symptoms are:

- irritability
- urges to smoke (cravings)
- anxiety
- feeling depressed
- feeling angry
- confusion

these symptoms appear in the form of:

- sleep problems
- restlessness
- loss of appetite
- tremors
- sweating (mainly at night)



Symptoms start one to three days after stopping cannabis and last for around two weeks. They are not life threatening and are a positive sign – that the body is adapting to being cannabis free.

consequences of cannabis dependence

- mental health problems
- physical health issues, like respiratory disease from smoking cannabis
- financial problems
- relationship issues
- employment problems

who becomes dependent on cannabis?

- of all those who try cannabis, one in ten become dependent
- if someone uses everyday they have a 50% chance of becoming dependent
- young people become cannabis dependent more quickly than adults
- males are more likely than females to be dependent on cannabis

what treatments are available for cannabis dependence?

- counselling
- group programs
- diversion programs (for people whose drug use gets them into trouble with the law)
- detoxification programs

Take home message:

The more often you use cannabis, the more likely it is that you will become dependent