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## CANNABIS

The most widely used illegal drug in Britain. It's a naturally occurring drug made from parts of the cannabis plant. It's a sedative and mild hallucinogen that makes some people feel chilled out and others feel sick. It's not very expensive and widely available.

**ID: Bhang, black, blast, blow, blunts. Bob Hope, bush, dope, draw, ganja, grass, hash, hashish, hemp, herb, marijuana, pot, puff, Northern Lights, resin, sensi, sensemilla, shit, skunk, smoke, soap, spliff, wacky backy, weed, zero. Some names are based on where it comes from... Afghan, homegrown, Moroccan etc**

### Appearance and use

Cannabis comes in different forms.

Hash is a blacky-brown lump made from the resin of the plant. It's quite often squidgey. Grass or weed is the dried leaves of the plant. It looks like tightly packed dried garden herbs.

Less common is sensimilla. This is bud grown in the absence of male plants and has no seeds. And cannabis oil which is dark and sticky and comes in a small jar.

Most people mix cannabis up with tobacco and smoke it as a spliff or a joint. Some people put it in a pipe. Others make tea with it or stick it in food like cakes.

### Cost

About £7.50 for a 'teenth' or sixteenth of an ounce.

About £15 for an 'eighth' of an ounce. And about £25 for a 'quarter'.

### Purity

Some unsuspecting people have been known to buy blocks of mud, stock cubes and garden herbs from people pretending to be dealers. The most unpure Cannabis is called 'soap bar'. It's contaminated with all sorts of things. This makes it cheaper but it's a false economy really as it is often harder to get stoned. Some users hate it so much they object to smoking it.

#### >>> Talk to FRANK

If you've got a question about drugs.

#### >>> Getting help

If you need practical help with a drug problem, search for drug projects and organisations in your area.

## The effects

The effects of any drug have a lot to do with who the users are with, what mood they're in and how much of the drug they take. Cannabis is no exception.

- Much like a cigarette, the effects are immediate and last from about an hour to a few hours. Smoking more will make the effects last longer obviously.
- Smoking a spliff makes most people happy, relaxed and at peace with the world but the effects vary from person to person. Some people have one puff and feel sick. Others get the giggles until the muscles in their face hurt.
- Cannabis is quite an introspective drug. Once stoned, users can find hidden depths in daytime television/ the most unlikely song lyrics.
- It's a mild hallucinogen. Colours and sounds appear brighter and sharper.
- It affects co-ordination. So it can make people a bit unsteady on their feet. Doing complicated things like operating machinery is not a good idea.
- Some people use it to relieve muscle pain associated with illnesses like MS (Multiple Sclerosis).
- Someone who's been smoking a lot will have bloodshot eyes, a dry mouth and may well have their head in the fridge. Hunger pangs are known as 'getting the munchies'.

There is a flip side:

- Even hardcore smokers can get anxious, panicky and suspicious.
- Cannabis screws with short-term memory.
- Eating or drinking the drug delays the effects and can make them stronger and longer lasting.

## Chances of getting hooked

Unlikely. There is a minimal risk of physical dependence. Psychological dependency occurs in about 10% of users.

Users are more likely to get addicted to nicotine if they roll their spliffs with tobacco. There are no physical withdrawal symptoms if you've only been using for a short while and there should be no problem stopping (unless you get addicted to the tobacco).

## The risks

Most of the risks associated with cannabis are linked to regular, heavy use.

- Smoking cannabis may be more harmful than smoking tobacco. Cannabis has a higher concentration of chemical 'nasties' that cause cancer.
- Smoking anything can give you heart problems, bronchitis and cancer. Smoking it with tobacco can get you hooked on tobacco.
- Cannabis can make asthma worse. And it's not a good idea with heart disease, high blood pressure or at risk from strokes.
- Regular, heavy use makes it harder to learn and concentrate. Being stoned all the time isn't going to win anyone 'Employee Of The Month'.
- Frequent use of cannabis can cut a man's sperm count and suppress ovulation in women.
- Some people begin to feel tired all the time and can't seem to get motivated.

- Some research has made a link between cannabis and mental illnesses like schizophrenia. If you've got a history of mental illness in the family you should think very carefully about getting stoned.
- Cannabis can cause a range of mental health problems from short lived and more common problems such as anxiety and paranoid feelings, to less common difficulties with actual psychotic states that may require medical treatment.  
These problems may fade away over several days after stopping using cannabis but occasionally may require a stay in hospital.
- Smoking cannabis when pregnant may harm the baby. Babies tend to be lower in birth weight and to have developmental problems.

## The law

Cannabis is currently a Class B substance like Speed. It's illegal to own it and it's illegal to supply it. It's also an offence to grow cannabis.

Possession can get you up to five years in prison and an unlimited fine, although most people are either cautioned or fined. Serious offences of supplying cannabis can get you up to 14 years in prison and an unlimited fine.

Supplying includes passing a joint to a mate. If you're convicted, the court has discretion to take account of the circumstances of the offender and the offence before passing sentence.

### Reclassification of cannabis

The Government is looking to reclassify cannabis from a Class B to a Class C drug and if approved by Parliament, the new legislation will take effect on 29 January 2004 across the United Kingdom.

Reclassification means the Government acknowledge that cannabis is not as harmful as other Class B substances like Speed. But the supply and possession of cannabis will still be illegal. Penalties for supplying will stay the same (with a maximum of 14 years). The maximum prison sentence for possession will be reduced from five years to two. Fines and other non-custodial sentences like compulsory community service will still apply.

For those over 18, most offences of cannabis possession are likely to result in a warning and confiscation of the drug. But you could be arrested if you smoke in a public place, near a place where there are children e.g a school, or where public order is at risk. Those who repeatedly commit offences will be arrested and will be prosecuted.

If you are under 18, and it's your first offence of cannabis possession you will normally be arrested, taken to the police station and given a warning or a reprimand.

If it's not your first offence, you will be given either a final warning or you will be charged. If you have been given a warning in the past and you get caught again you'll most likely be charged. When you get a warning you are referred to the local Youth Offending team (YOT).

### Driving while stoned

Cannabis affects your ability to drive safely. This puts other road users at risk. The police are using new roadside tests known as Field Impairment tests to determine whether motorists are unfit to drive. You could be required to provide a blood or urine sample for analysis. If you are convicted of being unfit to drive you could face prison, heavy fines or be disqualified from driving.

**Fact:** Passing drugs among friends is supplying in the eyes of the law.

**Fact:** Allowing people to take cannabis in your house or any other premises is illegal.

**Fact:** A drug conviction could stand between you and your ideal job.

**Fact:** If the police catch someone smoking cannabis in a club they will have the power to prosecute the landlord, club owner or person holding the party.

### **Using cannabis to relieve pain**

The possession of cannabis is an offence whatever you're using it for. The Government is exploring cannabis-based treatments. These are being tested at the moment and if they prove successful, the Home Secretary has said he's willing to change the law to allow cannabis-based medicine on prescription. This medicine could be available in 2004.