

Cannabis health check-up for adults



Public Health
England

1. How risky is my cannabis use?

The risk scoring outlined below is based on using the cannabis questions from the [ASSIST-Lite alcohol and drug use and tobacco smoking risk identification tool](#) (1). You can find out more about the risks associated with cannabis use in section 2 below.

Score for ASSIST-Lite cannabis questions	Risk	What this means
0	No risk	No risk
1	Increasing risk	Your increasing risk level of cannabis use is putting you at risk of harm to your physical and mental health or wellbeing
2	Higher risk	Your higher risk level of cannabis use may already be negatively affecting your physical and mental health or wellbeing
3	High risk	Your high risk level of cannabis use indicates that further support from a drug specialist is advisable

2. What concerns do I have about my cannabis use?

Cannabis affects people differently depending on how strong it is, how much is consumed and the individual's characteristics. Cannabis use can have positive effects, but the more you use cannabis, the more you increase your risk of mental and physical health problems.



Mental Health

- heightened feelings, for example more intense unhappiness or worry
- reduced motivation to do things
- impaired memory and disturbed sleep
- making you depressed, panicky, or even aggressive
- causing anxiety, paranoia and hallucinations
- causing a relapse in a pre-existing mental health problem including psychotic illnesses like schizophrenia
- increasing your chances of developing mental illnesses like schizophrenia, especially if you have a family background of mental illness
- causing dependence which can involve cravings, withdrawals and make it difficult to stop using cannabis, even when it's causing problems



Drug driving

Cannabis can affect your ability to drive safely, increasing your chances of having an accident and being convicted of drug driving.



Physical health

Smoking cannabis is likely to have many of the same long-term physical health risks as smoking tobacco (even if you don't mix the cannabis with tobacco) such as:

- making you wheeze, get out of breath and cough uncomfortably
- worsened asthma
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a group of lung conditions that cause breathing difficulties including emphysema and chronic bronchitis
- fertility problems (reduced sperm count or suppressed ovulation)
- harming a baby in the womb if you use while pregnant
- increased risk of lung cancer
- increased heart rate and blood pressure, making it particularly harmful for people with heart disease

Smoking cannabis with tobacco can lead to tobacco dependence which could make it harder to stop using cannabis.

Synthetic cannabinoids

Designed to act like the main psychoactive chemical in cannabis, "synthetic cannabinoids" such as Spice are stronger and more dangerous than cannabis. Find out more: talktofrank.com/drug/synthetic-cannabinoids

What's everyone else like?

We tend to think that people 'like us' behave like us. So, if we use cannabis and most of our friends do, we assume that most people 'like us' do too. This can lead us to think that a behaviour, like cannabis use, is far more common than it really is.

In England and Wales:

- ◆ Around one in ten men and one in twenty women report using cannabis in the last year



- ◆ Just under one in five young adults (aged 16 to 24) report using cannabis in the last year.



- ◆ Of those people who do use cannabis, most do so only once or twice a year with one in ten using cannabis daily.



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What benefits of cutting down or quitting cannabis matter to me?



You'll know which of the potential benefits of cutting down or quitting cannabis mean the most to you. They might include:

- more motivation
- better memory
- save money
- improved sleep
- improved relationships with family and friends
- improved mood
- reduced anxiety, depression, panic, aggression and hallucinations
- if you were smoking cannabis previously: breathing more easily, reduced wheezing, coughing and asthmatic symptoms
- reduced or no cravings
- improved fertility and reduced risk of harm to your baby in the womb
- less tobacco use and so reduced risk of lung cancer
- better heart health and blood pressure
- reduced risk of developing or relapsing into psychotic illnesses like schizophrenia



If you find your mental health does not improve when you stop using cannabis, please talk to your GP or a mental health professional about getting additional support to address any underlying issues.

How could I reduce my cannabis use or related risk?

You can take control of your cannabis use by reducing how much you use and reducing the related risks.



Reduce your risk

- Use less or no tobacco in your spliffs to reduce tobacco-related harm including the risk of becoming dependent
- Stop smoking with stop smoking aids and specialist support [nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/)
- Change how you use cannabis – don't smoke joints, pipes or bongs. Heating cannabis (also known as vapourising – not to be confused with vaping) rather than smoking is likely to be less harmful to physical health
- Don't vape home-made or illegal e-liquids that contain, or might contain, THC (tetrahydrocannabinol)
- If you choose to eat cannabis, try a small amount first and wait for 1-2 hours before having more, especially if you've never eaten cannabis before
- Choose lower risk cannabis products – Avoid those with high THC content such as “skunk”
- Don't drive or operate machinery when stoned
- Don't use cannabis at all if you are pregnant or trying to conceive
- Don't use cannabis at all if you have a family history of psychosis (parent, child or sibling)
- Avoid using cannabis with other drugs or alcohol
- Don't use synthetic cannabinoids



Reduce or quit your cannabis use

You may find the tips below helpful in reducing your motivation to use cannabis:

- Use less cannabis - Start with a few puffs and wait for 20 minutes to see how you feel before having any more
- Don't use cannabis every day. Try to increase your cannabis-free days, cut down to weekly or monthly, or stop completely
- Don't use cannabis when you are worried, unhappy or have noticed an increase in symptoms of a mental health condition.
- Speak to a professional about other ways to manage anxiety, low mood, sleep trouble or pain.
- Delay using until the evening
- Tell trusted friends and family about your plan to reduce or quit
- Get face-to-face, phone or online support from people who are also trying to quit, or have already (ukna.org marijuana-anonymous.org.uk/)

You may find the tips below helpful in reducing the things that encourage you to use cannabis:

- Throw away any equipment associated with cannabis
- Delete your dealer's phone number and block them on social media, or remove dark web browsers from your computer
- Avoid situations or people that might make you feel like using
- Spend time with people who support your decision to reduce or quit
- Practice saying no to the offer of cannabis: make direct eye contact, say no quickly and firmly, suggest something else to do, ask the person not to offer you cannabis again and change the subject
- If you are craving cannabis, remember the 4 Ds:
 - **delay** the decision about whether to use for a few minutes
 - **distract** yourself for example by going for a walk, listening to music or a podcast or phoning a friend
 - **decide** not to use
 - **deep breathing** to help you relax

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What do I want to do about my cannabis use?

This is your opportunity to set goals to reduce cannabis use and risk. It can be helpful to decide now what your goal is and how you plan to achieve it. Try to make the goal clear and realistic. It might be helpful to think about who could support you to achieve it.

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Where can I get further advice, support and treatment?

- ◆ Find out everything you need to know about drugs, their effects and the law. Talk to FRANK for facts, support and advice on drugs and alcohol today talktofrank.com/
- ◆ If you are worried about your use, you can call FRANK on **0300 1236600** for friendly, confidential advice.
- ◆ The FRANK drug and alcohol service directory talktofrank.com/get-help/find-support-near-you will help you to find local drug and alcohol treatment services.

Notes for professionals

(1) Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Tool Lite (ASSIST-Lite) is an alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, stimulants, sedatives, opioids and other psychoactive substances (including use of medicines not as prescribed) risk identification tool.

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