

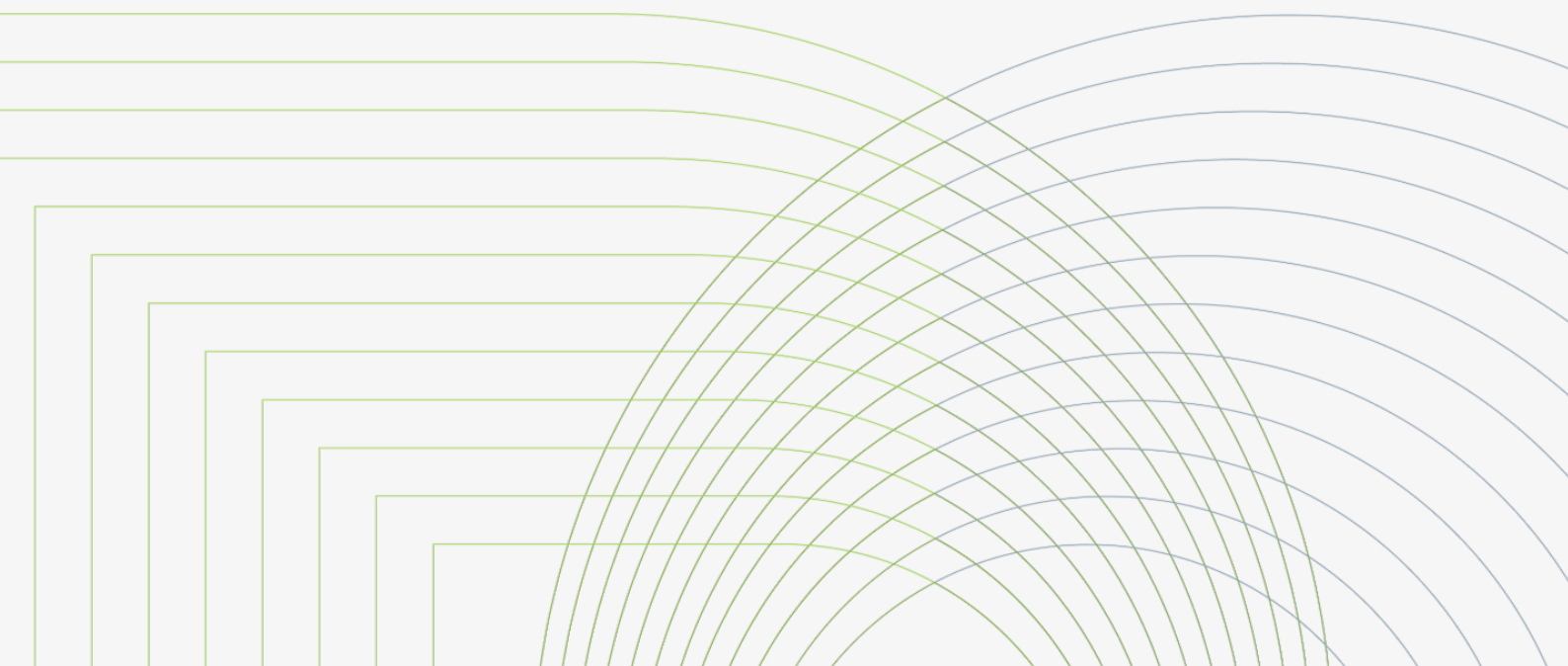
Module 4.2

Drugs and Alcohol:

Cannabis

Keeping the Body in Mind – Resources

Consumer Learning Module



Module 4.2: Cannabis

Content:

About Cannabis	3
Physical Effects	4
Mental Health Effects	5
Available Supports	10
Lena's Story	11

About Cannabis

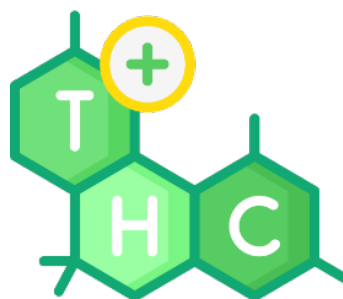
What is cannabis?

Cannabis (also known as marijuana, pot, dope, weed or yandi) is a drug that is often seen in a more positive light than other 'harder' drugs. It is readily available, and many people use it. Most users do not fully understand the impact cannabis can have on their lives.



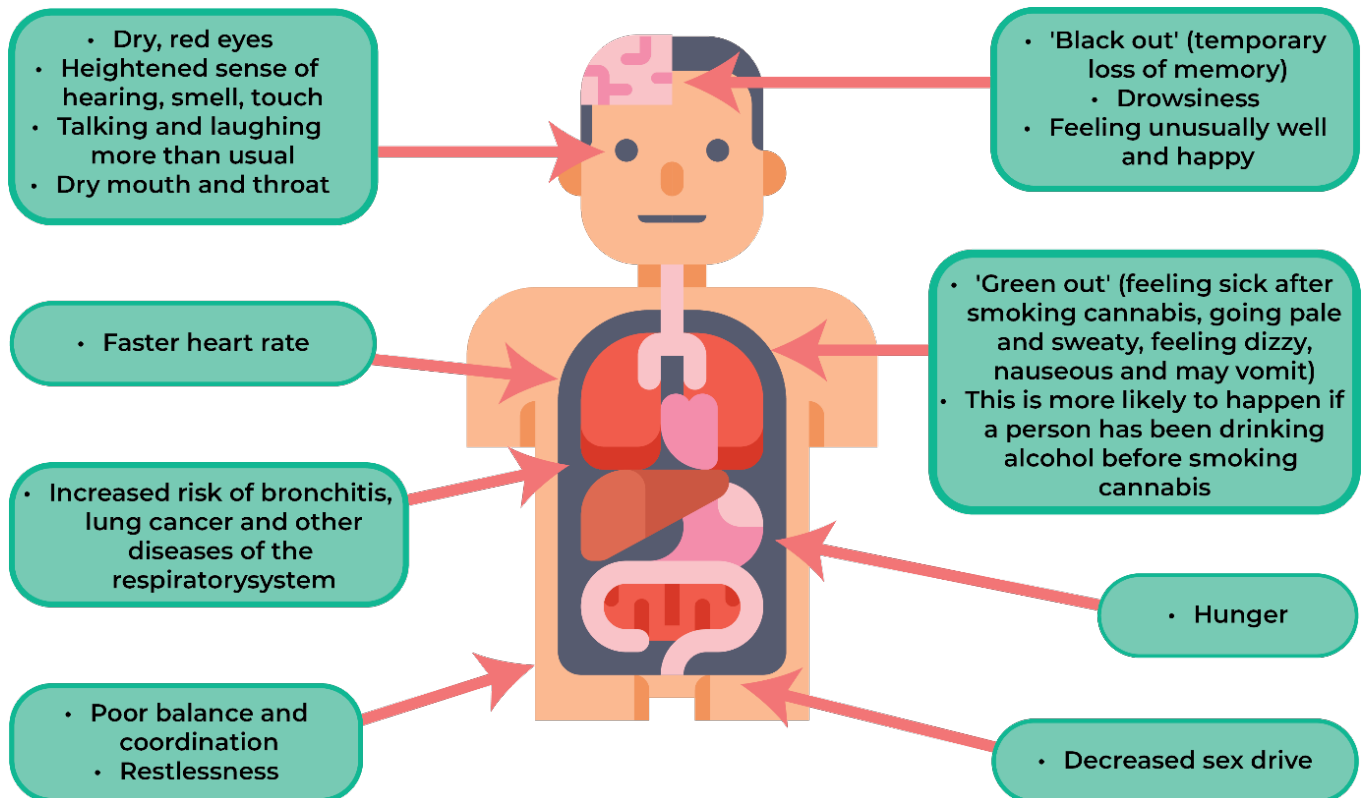
What is THC?

THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) is the chemical in cannabis that binds to receptors on some of your brain cells (a bit like a lock and key), causing changes in the way the cell works. These changes result in the cell giving out different signals to your body, that make you feel high. This means you experience a change in mood and may see or feel things in a different way. Some parts of the plant contain a higher level of THC than other parts.



How does cannabis affect me?

Physical Effects



Cannabis also damages brain cells. Prolonged use can have permanent effects on your ability to think clearly and quickly. Cannabis stays in the body for a long time – up to six weeks. This means that the immediate negative effects can last for that long.



Activity: Do you notice any physical effects on your body after using cannabis? What are they?

Mental Health Effects

If you use cannabis, you may:

- Feel confused.
- Experience changes in your perception of time, sound, sight, touch, and distance.
- See or hear things which are not there (hallucinations).
- Feel distant or separate from reality.
- Feel anxious or panicky.
- Become dependent (get addicted to cannabis).
- Be less motivated.
- Find it hard to concentrate.
- Have problems remembering things.
- Focus on one thing and ignore all other things.
- Experience depression.
- Experience paranoia or psychosis. This is more likely if you already have a mental health condition or a pre-disposition (i.e. are already 'at risk') of schizophrenia, but can happen to anyone. A psychotic episode can be triggered by cannabis use.





Activity: How does cannabis impact your mental health?

Psychosis is often triggered by a combination of things, and cannabis use is one of them.

For people who have experienced psychosis, cannabis can cause a relapse, even if the person hasn't experienced any psychotic symptoms recently. Cannabis can also trigger anxiety and depression. Due to the slowing down of thought and action, people are often less motivated to do things that give them satisfaction or make them feel good.

Therefore, it can be easy for someone to feel down or low if they use cannabis regularly. Also, while people often feel more relaxed, temporarily, when they use cannabis, it can also cause increased anxiety because it can trigger paranoid thoughts and ideas.



Why should I change my use of cannabis?

From a practical point of view, the negative effects of cannabis can get in the way of you doing what you want and need to do, to stay happy and healthy.

For instance, cannabis can decrease motivation, so you may not follow through with your goals. You may not show up to meet friends or family because when you are using, these things matter less to you.

However, in the long run you suffer, because people may start to think you are unreliable and you may damage your relationships and limit your opportunities in the future.

Cannabis is also illegal in all Australian States and Territories except the ACT, so there is a risk of a criminal record if you use this drug.



Activity: Thinking of all the effects of cannabis use that you have explored above, which of these get in the way of your health goals?

Effect	Goal that is impacted

Why do I use cannabis?

Often people use cannabis because they are bored, stressed, in pain or can't sleep, or because it is easily accessible, or their friends are using it. To make an empowered decision about whether cannabis is right for you, it is important to understand the things that may be influencing your choices.



Activity: What are the reasons that you use cannabis? If you wanted to cut down, what would you have to change about the things influencing you, to make that happen?

Influence/Trigger	How to change it?



Activity: Using SMART goals, list some achievable goals for this week:

Available Supports

Here are some free supports for people wanting to cease cannabis use in New South Wales, Australia:

- **Cannabis Information & Support:** A website that provides educational resources, tools for quitting, and a free Joint Effort Tools to Quit program that lets you buddy up and get support from others who want to quit cannabis. www.cannabissupport.com.au
- **National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline:** For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs, call the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline. It will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in your state or territory. These local alcohol and other drug telephone services offer support, information, counselling, and referral to services. Phone: 1800 250 015
- Your local health service may be able to provide you with some additional support. Speak to your mental health worker or doctor and ask what is available.

Lena's Story

Lena is a 25-year-old woman who lives with her parents in Sydney. She has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and has been using cannabis since she was 15. She says cannabis helps her cope with stress and anxiety, but it also makes her hear voices and feel paranoid sometimes. She wants to quit cannabis because she feels it is affecting her health, her relationships, and her goals.

Lena decided to join a support group for people who want to quit cannabis, which is a free service offered by a local community organisation. She went to the group meetings every week and met other people who had similar experiences and challenges. She also got information and advice from the group facilitator, who was a trained counsellor. She felt welcomed and safe in the group and made some new friends.

Lena also talked to her doctor and her therapist about her decision to quit cannabis. They were supportive and gave her advice on how to deal with the physical and mental effects of quitting. They also helped her find other ways to cope with stress and anxiety, such as meditation, exercise, and hobbies. Lena learned how to identify and manage her triggers for using cannabis, such as boredom, loneliness, or anger. She also learned how to deal with cravings by using distraction techniques, such as calling a friend or playing games on her phone.

After six weeks of quitting cannabis, Lena noticed some positive changes in her life. She felt more energetic, more focused, and more confident. She slept better and had fewer nightmares. She heard fewer voices and felt less paranoid. She also got along better with her parents and made some new friends at a local art class. She felt proud of herself for quitting cannabis and achieving her goals.

Lena still faces some challenges in her recovery journey, such as coping with stress or dealing with stigma. But she knows she is not alone and she has support from the group, her doctor, her therapist, and her family. She also knows she has strengths and abilities that can help her overcome any difficulties. She has hope for the future and plans to go back to school and pursue her dream of becoming a graphic designer.



Congratulations! You've now completed module 4.2 Drugs and Alcohol - Cannabis



Scan the QR code or visit the link for online access to all of the modules and a complete list of references or visit the link below:

mindgardens.org.au/KBIMResources



Developed by the Mindgardens Neuroscience Network and the Keeping the Body in Mind Team 2023.

Funded by the Mental Health Commission of New South Wales