

Cannabis: What to know ... and when to cut back

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well to learn well*

The Ceriale Center
for Cornell Health
110 Ho Plaza,
Ithaca, NY
14853-3101

Web:
health.cornell.edu

Phone (24/7):
607-255-5155

Fax:
607-255-0269

Use of cannabis—including its high-THC* variety, marijuana—has increased among U.S. college students over the last decade (although at Cornell, anonymous surveys indicate that use among students remains low).

This increase in use coincides with many states legalizing cannabis for medical and/or recreational use, which has also led to a perception among some that cannabis use is without risk.

However, THC concentrations in cannabis have increased significantly in recent years, raising the risk of possible harms. Additionally, research shows that the effects of cannabis on the developing brain (until a person is in their mid-to-late 20s) may pose higher risks for young people.

**The main psychoactive compound in cannabis that produces the intoxicating “high” effects*

Tips for safer cannabis use

- Only use products purchased from a reputable source, like a licensed dispensary.
- Start low (with a small amount) and go slow (wait to feel its full effects before using more).
- If consuming edibles, make sure you know the dosage (2.5 mg of THC is a recommended starting dose). Be aware that it may take an hour or more after consuming to feel its full effect.
- Take extra precaution with cannabis concentrates like wax, shatter, or crumble, which have extremely high levels of THC, making them easier to overconsume.
- Do not mix cannabis with alcohol or other drugs.
- Do not drive while high. Driving under the influence of cannabis is illegal (even if you have legally obtained the cannabis), and dangerous.
- Keep use infrequent and stick to lower doses to help avoid harmful consequences and/or dependency (see more below).

Short-term harms that can be caused by cannabis use

Consuming too much THC—or experiencing a THC overdose—won’t be fatal, but it can result in some very distressing symptoms, including:

- extreme confusion
- anxiety and paranoia
- panic attacks
- mild hallucinations
- increased risk of suicidal ideation



Legalization of cannabis has led to the perception that using cannabis is without risk.

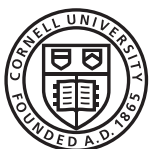
- fast heart rate and changes in blood pressure
- nausea and vomiting
- Cannabis-Induced Psychotic Disorder (a rare and usually temporary condition characterized by delusions and hallucinations, which may have links to chronic psychotic conditions like schizophrenia)

Long-term harms that can be caused by cannabis use

Frequent and prolonged use of cannabis can have cognitive, mental health, and physical health effects, including:

- **Reduced cognitive functioning:** Cannabis use directly affects brain function, and can negatively impact memory, learning, attention, concentration, decision-making, motivation, emotion regulation, coordination, and reaction time.
- **Mental health problems, including increased risk of psychosis:** Cannabis use has been linked to increased risk of depression, social anxiety, and thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts. There is also an association between cannabis use and schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (which is stronger among those who start using at a young age).
- **Gastrointestinal problems:** Some long-term users experience Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS), causing cycles of severe nausea, abdominal pain, and vomiting.
- **Other health problems:** Frequent and prolonged cannabis use can cause lung damage (particularly when smoking or vaping cannabis) and can lead to increased risk of stroke, heart disease, and other vascular diseases.

Some of these symptoms/impacts can remain even after if a person no longer uses cannabis.



Signs of cannabis dependency

Contrary to common beliefs that cannabis is not addictive, research shows that **about 1 in 10 people who use cannabis will become addicted or develop a cannabis use disorder**. Signs that someone may be developing a cannabis use disorder include:

- having a preoccupation with and compulsion to use cannabis
- having to use increasing amounts of cannabis to get the same effect
- trying unsuccessfully to quit or cut back
- experiencing withdrawal symptoms when not using (including anger, irritability, anxiety, restlessness, depressed mood, insomnia, and sometimes physical symptoms)
- continuing to use despite experiencing negative consequences

When & how to cut back

If cannabis use is negatively impacting your life, and/or you're experiencing symptoms of cannabis dependency or a cannabis use disorder, it may be time to cut back or quit.

Reducing cannabis use can be challenging for some people. If you're looking for support, **schedule a free AOD Support Session** to speak with a CAPS Therapist who specializes in substance use issues. To schedule, call 607-255-5155 or log in to myCornellHealth (mycornellhealth.health.cornell.edu).

You may also want to **try a tolerance break (or "T-Break")** – a voluntary pause on cannabis, typically lasting about 21 days, to help lower your tolerance. A T-Break guide – as well as other helpful resources including an urge tracking log and a habit change worksheet – are listed on our website: health.cornell.edu/cannabis.

Please note that at this time, there is no FDA-approved medication for treating cannabis use disorder.

More information

- **About cannabis:** health.cornell.edu/cannabis
- **About Alcohol & Other Drug (AOD) services at Cornell Health:** health.cornell.edu/AOD

NY State Law and Campus policy on cannabis use

In 2021, NY State legalized the recreational use of cannabis for adults aged 21 and older. As of 2022, recreational cannabis can be sold legally through state-approved dispensaries.

*However, **cannabis use remains prohibited on Cornell's campus.** Cornell is subject to federal laws that expressly prohibit the possession, use, or distribution of cannabis on university property or as part of university-sponsored events.*

*Additionally, **driving under the influence of cannabis is illegal.***