what treatment is available? Compared to other drugs, there are fewer specific treatments available for cannabis-related problems. Most involve counseling, although various drug treatment options are being researched.

what are the effects of passive cannabis smoking? Traces of cannabis can be found in body fluids as a result of passive cannabis smoking but most testing companies report that these traces are too low to register as a ‘positive’ test. Cannabis smoke contains many of the dangerous substances that are found in tobacco smoke, such as tar, carbon monoxide and cancer-causing chemicals, some in higher amounts. Therefore those who associate with cannabis smokers can experience similar problems to those experienced by passive tobacco smokers.

which is worse, smoking tobacco or smoking cannabis? Smoking anything is damaging to your health. Smoking either drug over time can cause a range of serious respiratory and other health problems. Both tobacco and cannabis smoke contain agents that increase the risk of cancer.

Most people who try cannabis have previously used tobacco and many current cannabis smokers also smoke cigarettes. Smoking both cannabis and tobacco results in a greater health risk than smoking either alone.

does cannabis use lead to the use of other drugs? Most people who use illicit drugs first used substances like alcohol, tobacco or cannabis. However, the vast majority of people who use cigarettes, alcohol or cannabis never use other illegal drugs. Nevertheless, cannabis use, particularly regular use at a younger age, increases the risk of other drug use.

does cannabis affect driving skills? Cannabis affects the user’s perception. Altered perception can have a negative effect on driving skills. Cannabis affects a person’s ability to react quickly, divert attention to the road. Latest evidence suggests that driving under the influence of cannabis appears to increase the risk of motor vehicle crashes by a factor of two or three times.

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if I know someone who has a problem with cannabis, or I need help myself, where can I go? The Cannabis Information and Helpline provides a nationally available free call service for people who use cannabis themselves or those concerned about the cannabis use of a friend or family member. Callers will receive reliable, evidence-based information, support and advice about how to communicate with users and help engage them in interventions.

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Publication date: July 2011
what is cannabis?
Cannabis is the general name for products derived from the plant Cannabis sativa. The main active ingredient in cannabis is called delta 9-tetrahydrocannabinol, commonly known as THC. This is the part of the plant that gives the ‘high’.

Cannabis is used in three main forms: marijuana, hashish and hash oil. Marijuana is made from dried flowers and leaves of the cannabis plant. It is the least potent of all the cannabis products and is usually smoked.

Hashish is made from the resin (a secreted gum) of the cannabis plant. It is dried and pressed into small blocks and smoked. It can also be added to food and eaten. Hash oil, the most potent cannabis product, is a thick oil obtained from hashish. It is also smoked.

what are the short-term effects of cannabis?
Cannabis affects every user differently and this can be influenced by many things including how much of the drug is taken, the environment it is used in, as well as the weight, size and mood of the person using it.

The short-term effects of using cannabis may include:
- feeling of well-being
- talkativeness
- drowsiness
- loss of inhibitions (doing or saying things one usually wouldn’t)
- decreased motor skills
- bloodshot eyes
- dryness of the eyes, mouth and throat
- anxiety and paranoia

is cannabis stronger than it used to be?
Although the potency of cannabis overall may have increased, perhaps doubling in the past decade, more importantly, the range of THC levels is now greater than it once was, making potency much more variable than in the past. There is little evidence to suggest, however, that it has increased as dramatically as has been reported.

Various factors could have contributed to this increase in potency. Some people believe that hydroponically grown cannabis is more potent than cannabis grown ‘naturally’. There has also been some discussion that the reported difference could be due to cultivation techniques and fertilisers used by hydroponic growers.

what are the long-term effects of cannabis?

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- increased risk of respiratory diseases associated with smoking, including cancer
- dependence
- decreased memory and learning abilities
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what do we know about cannabis and mental health?
Some people experience unpleasant effects such as anxiety and panic when they use cannabis. In high doses, use of the drug can cause confusion, delusions or hallucinations. These symptoms are more likely to be felt by people who are not used to the effects of cannabis or who have smoked more than usual.

Some people, particularly younger people and those with a family history of mental health problems, are more vulnerable to the mental health effects of cannabis. Although it is rare, some people may experience a short-term psychotic episode (a split from reality) after a heavy session of cannabis use. This can last from several hours up to 2-3 days, and may include delusions or hallucinations.

Frequent cannabis use has been shown to increase the risk of psychotic illness and the development of depression.

Some people believe that hydropodically grown cannabis is more potent than cannabis grown ‘naturally’. There is no evidence that the reported difference could be due to cultivation techniques and fertilisers used by hydroponic growers. There is currently no evidence to support these theories.

what is the relationship between cannabis and mental health?
Cannabis can affect the brain’s reward system and stress response system.

what is the relationship between cannabis and physical health?
Cannabis can affect the heart and blood vessels.

what is the relationship between cannabis and the respiratory system?
Cannabis can affect the lungs and respiratory system.

can you become dependent on cannabis?
Around one in ten people who ever try cannabis will become dependent on it. It has been estimated that around 200,000 Australian adults are dependent on cannabis.

People who use daily are most at risk, facing about a one in two chance of becoming dependent. Young people and at even greater risk if they use cannabis daily. Dependent users can experience a variety of psychological, social and physical symptoms, including withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms include feeling irritable, anxious and depressed, sleeping problems and decreased appetite.

do many people need treatment for their cannabis use?
As the number of cannabis users who have problems with their use has increased, so too has the number of people seeking treatment for the illegal drugs. In Australia, more people treat for cannabis than any other. People seek treatment because of the physical, psychological or social effects of cannabis use, and/or because they feel they have become dependent.
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Reports of increased strength could also be impacted on by changes in the way the drug is used and the increased availability of the stronger parts of the plant, particularly the flowering heads or buds.

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Some cannabis users who have problems with their use have increased, so have the number of people seeking treatment for cannabis use. More people seek treatment for cannabis use than any other. People request treatment because of the physical, psychological or social effects of cannabis use, and/or because they feel they have become dependent.

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As the number of cannabis users who have problems with their use has increased, so have the number of people seeking treatment for illegal drugs in Australia. More people seek treatment for cannabis than for any other drug. People seek treatment because of the physical, psychological or social effects of cannabis use, and/or because they feel they have become dependent.
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Compared to other drugs, there are fewer specific treatments available for cannabis-related problems. Most involve counselling, although various drug treatment options are being investigated.

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fast facts on cannabis

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