get the facts on does cannabis cause people to become ‘demotivated’?
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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 have the number of people seeking treatment. Of the illegal drugs in Australia, more people seek treatment for cannabis than any other. People usually request treatment because of the physical, psychological or social effects of cannabis use, and/or because they feel they have become dependent.

what treatment is available?
Treatment usually involves counselling and in some cases medication may be prescribed. A good place to start is to visit your GP who can help you develop a mental health care plan. Services for care services provided by health care professionals may be available.

is there anything you can do if you have a family history of mental illness?
If you are aware that you have a family history of mental illness it is important that you avoid using cannabis. Since cannabis is widely used and people are starting to use it at a younger age, it is extremely important, especially for young people, to have some knowledge of their family health history. Having a family history of mental illness does not necessarily mean a person is going to develop a problem, but knowing one’s family history might be a way to avoid an early onset or even unnecessary onset of a mental illness. It might make people who know they may be at higher risk of developing a problem stop and think before they choose to use, or at least choose to use in a less risky way and keep their use to a minimum instead of making it a daily habit.

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There are a range of risks associated with the use of cannabis. It is the drug’s effects on mental health however that attracts the most attention and public concern, particularly in relation to young people.

what do we know about cannabis and mental health?
Cannabis has a range of mental health effects on users. Some experience very unpleasant psychological effects when they use cannabis, like severe anxiety or panic reactions. At high doses users may hear voices or see/taste/smell things that are not really there (hallucinations), or have beliefs that are not true (delusions). 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 they usually do. These experiences do not usually last after the effects of the drug wear off, but can be very frightening, and may be enough to put some people off using again.

Some people appear to be more vulnerable to the mental health effects of cannabis than others, particularly younger people and those with a family history of mental health problems.

can cannabis cause psychosis?
Psychosis refers to a group of mental illnesses where people experience difficulty in distinguishing between what is real and what is not. Someone suffering from a psychosis may experience hallucinations and delusions, which are abnormalities in the way people relate to others, and therefore limiting their ability to function in life. Schizophrenia is the most well-known of these psychotic illnesses. Psychotic symptoms can last from several hours up to 2-3 days, with disturbances in thinking, emotions and behavior. This is uncomman and the symptoms, although frightening at the time, usually go away if use of cannabis is stopped. Cannabis may also trigger a similar psychotic experience or ‘episode’ in people with a personal or family history of mental health problems.

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The link between cannabis and depression is not clear cut. However, people who use cannabis are more likely to experience depression than others who may have a personal or family history of mental health problems or bipolar affective disorder. Young women are more likely to be affected. Some people use cannabis to help them feel less depressed or get to sleep. This is not recommended and can make things worse.

is there a link between cannabis use by young people and suicide?
Heavy cannabis use is believed to be one of many factors that place a person at risk of suicide. Other factors include personal and family history of mental health problems, social disadvantage and alcohol use.

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Cannabis is less likely to cause violence than other drugs such as alcohol or amphetamines. Cannabis users who commit violent acts typically have a history of violence before they first use the drug. During cannabis withdrawal it is common to experience irritability, which, if not adequately managed, can be associated with aggression.
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can cannabis cause bipolar affective disorder?
Bipolar affective disorder is a mood disorder characterized by episodes of mania and depression. People with bipolar affective disorder may experience extreme changes in mood, energy, activity, and behavior. These episodes can last from a few days to several weeks, and can be very disruptive to daily life. People with bipolar affective disorder may also experience psychotic symptoms, such as hearing voices or believing things that are not true.

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Psychosis refers to a group of mental illnesses where people experience difficulty in distinguishing between what is real and what is not. Someone suffering from a psychosis may experience hallucinations (hearing or seeing things that are not really there), delusions (false beliefs that are not true) or disordered thinking. These symptoms are usually accompanied by confused thinking and speech, making it difficult for others to understand them and therefore limiting their ability to function in life. Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness. Psychotic symptoms can last from several hours up to 3-5 days, with disturbances in thinking, emotions and behaviour. This is uncommon and the symptoms, although frightening at the time, usually go away when use of cannabis is stopped. Cannabis may also trigger a similar psychotic experience or ‘episode’ in people with a personal or family history of mental health problems.

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The link between cannabis and depression is not clear cut. However, people who use cannabis and later develop depression may experience more severe symptoms than others who use to experience depression. There does seem to be a link between regular cannabis use and later depression, with young women more likely to be affected. Some people use cannabis to help them feel less depressed or get to sleep. This is not recommended and can make things worse.

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is there anything you can do if you have a family history of mental illness?

If you or a family member have a history of mental illness, it is important that you avoid using cannabis. Since cannabis is widely used and people are starting to use it at a younger age, it is extremely important, especially for young people, to be aware of the benefits and risks of their family’s mental history. Having a family history of mental illness does not necessarily mean a person is going to develop a problem, but knowing one’s family history might be a way to avoid an early onset or even unnecessary onset of a mental illness. It might make people who know they may be at higher risk of developing a problem stop and think before they choose to use, or at least choose to use in a less risky way and keep their use to a minimum instead of making it a daily habit.

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