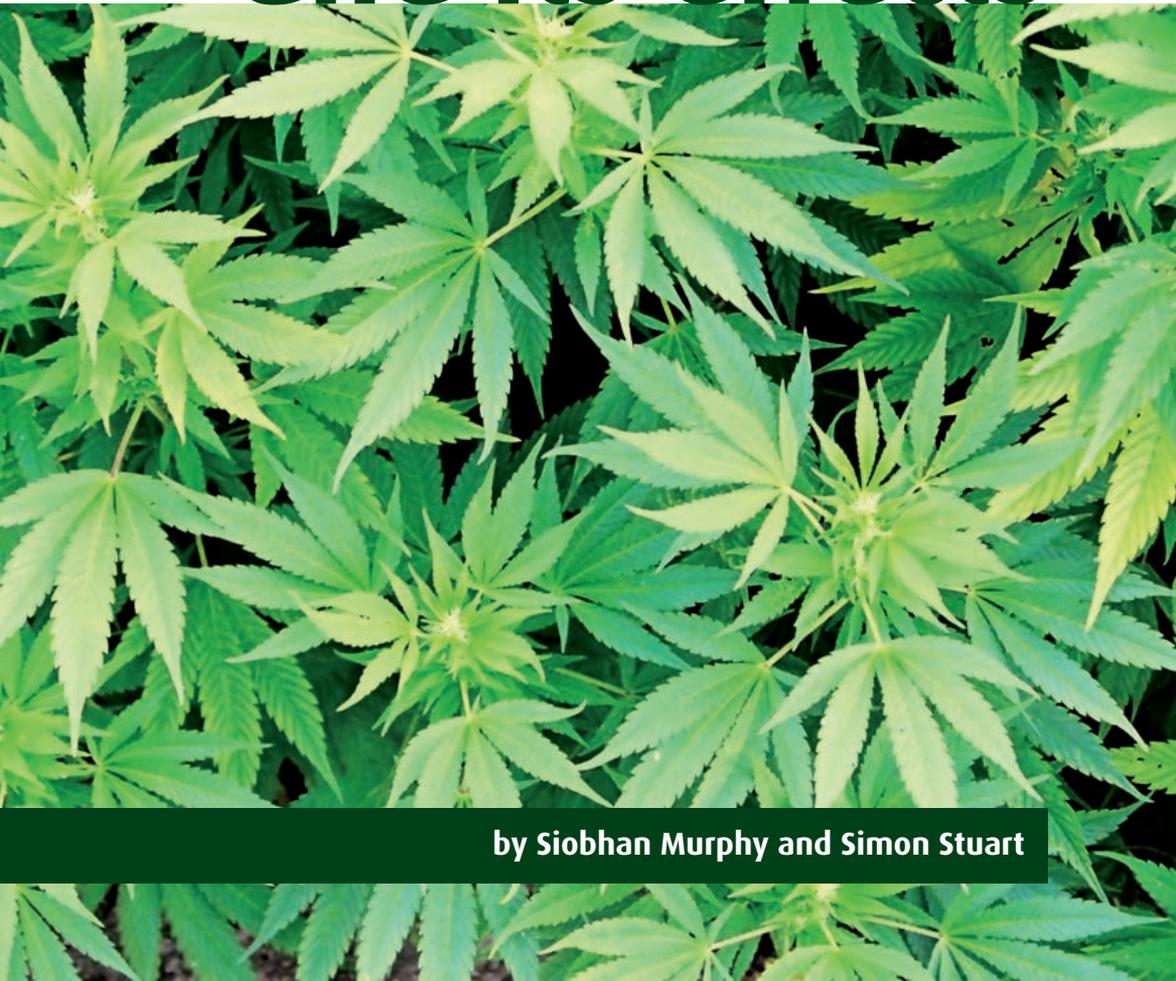
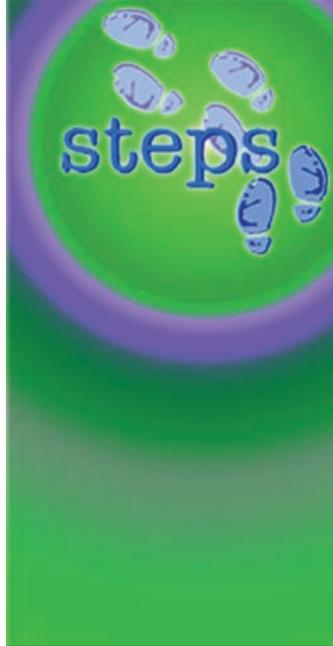


Cannabis and its effects



by Siobhan Murphy and Simon Stuart



www.glasgowsteps.com

This booklet is for people who would like to know more about cannabis and its effects.



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4 Cannabis and its effects

Part 1: All about cannabis

1

- What is cannabis?
- Other names for cannabis
- Why do people use it?
- Facts and myths



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CANNABIS IS THE MOST WIDELY USED ILLEGAL DRUG IN THE UK. IT IS USED MOST BY PEOPLE AGED 16-29, ALTHOUGH PEOPLE OF ALL AGES USE IT.

Cannabis is a drug made from the hemp plant. It is usually smoked, either on its own or mixed with tobacco. Most of the time it is rolled up like a cigarette (a **joint** or **spliff**) but it can also be smoked in a **pipe** or **bong**.

Some people make it into **tea** or bake it into **cakes** or **brownies**.

It is a **sedative** – meaning it can make you feel chilled-out and sleepy.

It is also a **hallucinogen** – meaning it can alter the way you see and think about things.

WHAT IS CANNABIS



CANNABIS TENDS TO COME IN THREE MAIN FORMS. THESE ARE:

MARIJUANA, OR HERBAL CANNABIS

Known as **grass** or **weed**, this is made from the dried leaves of the plant.

It looks like leaves or herbs.



HASHISH, OR CANNABIS RESIN

Hashish, or **hash**, is made from the resin of the cannabis plant. It looks like either a black or brown lump.



SKUNK

This is a newer form of herbal cannabis, or weed, which can be two or three times stronger.



CANNABIS?





OTHER NAMES FOR CANNABIS

These are just some of the names you might hear used:

Bhang, black, blast, blow, blunts, Bob Hope, bush, dope, draw, ganja, grass, hash, hemp, herb, pot, puff, marijuana, Northern Lights, sensi, skunk, soap, soap-bar, spliff, wacky backy and weed ... to name only a few.

Other words or phrases you might hear:

Stoned – Feeling the effects of cannabis.

Skins – Cigarette papers, used for rolling a joint (also called skinning up).

Toploading – Putting more cannabis at the front end of the joint so the person who smokes it first gets a bigger hit.

Munchies – Feeling really hungry after smoking cannabis.

Whitey – Having a whitey is having a bad reaction to cannabis, especially when you've been drinking as well. The world starts spinning and you can feel faint – or like you're freaking out. Your skin goes sweaty and pale (which is where the name comes from) and you can be sick and even pass out.

CANNABIS



WHY DO PEOPLE USE IT?

Most people use it because of the way it makes them feel. It can make them feel **chilled out** and **relaxed** – like they're unwinding or escaping their problems.

It can also make people more **talkative** and **giggly**. Some people, like musicians and artists, say it makes them more **creative**.

Many people will use it because their friends are using it. They might want to be part of the group ... or they might feel under pressure to do it.

Some people, especially older adults, feel it helps to relieve pain.

For some people, using cannabis becomes the norm: something they do every day. This can cause problems with other parts of their life.

SMOKERS SPEAK OUT

Here are what two people told us about their own cannabis use. There are more of these stories later in this booklet.

"I'd like to think I could give up dope at any time. Deep down, though, I couldn't imagine not having a smoke every night – I couldn't cope"

Debs, age 23

"After a year of smoking gear I dropped out of school. I found it hard to focus and couldn't be bothered any more. I lost touch with my best mates. I've hardly seen any of them since"

Colin, age 17

For more information, see **Signs of Dependency**.



FACTS AND MYTHS

There are many facts and myths about cannabis. Here are some of them.

FACT

Cannabis has been strongly linked to mental-health problems.

Although cannabis can make you feel light-headed and happy, lots of users find it can make them **anxious**, **panicky** and **paranoid** – even if they are used to taking it. Although these short-term effects wear off, they can be very unpleasant while they last.

Regular use can make people feel **sluggish** and **dull**. Used over longer periods, cannabis has been linked to mental health problems, such as **depression** and **psychosis** – a sense of losing touch with reality, which can be terrifying.

Research is still going on, but doctors now believe that the more cannabis you use, the more likely you are to develop a psychotic illness, such as **schizophrenia**. They also think the risk is much higher if you start smoking before the age of 15.

Doctors agree that if you have a history of any kind of mental health problems, you should not use cannabis.

For more information see **Effects of cannabis**, below.



FACTS AND MYTHS

FACT

It affects your coordination.

Cannabis alters your perception and reactions. That's why it is illegal to drive after using it.

FACT

Cannabis is sometimes "cut" with other things.

Dealers can mix hash with other substances in order to bulk it out and increase their profit. **Boot polish** and even **animal dung** are just two of the things reported to be used. Grass isn't necessarily any more pure: suppliers can **spray** it or **soak** it to alter how much it looks and weighs.

FACT

Cannabis has been linked to fertility problems.

Some scientists say that men who often smoke cannabis can reduce their chances of having children. It has been linked to similar problems in women, too. However, doctors need to do much more work to understand this properly.



FACTS AND MYTHS

Smokers speak out

"Sometimes I get random voices in my head. I've talked to them speaking out loud."

"I closed my eyes for about a minute and then I experienced the scariest hallucination ever. I had an 'out of body experience'. My heart was pumping so hard that I could feel it through my whole body and I just knew that it was going to stop. From where I was, I could see my body lying on my bed; I was sweating and breathing heavy. Everywhere I looked was black. I could hear my thoughts screaming at me and I had visions of flashbacks from my life. I could see my body being dragged away by grey dust and I truly believed that I was dying. The feeling was so petrifying and unbelievable, I actually felt like I was going to die."

FACTS AND MYTHS

FACT

Using cannabis is illegal.

Cannabis is a Class B drug. This means you can be arrested for having even a small amount of it on your person.

In fact, even allowing other people to use it in your house is against the law.

Although the UK government reclassified it as a Class C drug in 2004, it was taken back up to a Class B in 2009. The maximum penalty for possession is five years in prison – plus an unlimited fine.

If you grow your own cannabis, or have a large amount of it for your own use, the police might decide you were planning to sell it and charge you as a dealer. For dealing, the maximum penalty is 14 years plus an unlimited fine.

MYTH

Cannabis is not addictive.

Although many people believe it is not addictive, this is not strictly true. Regular users have to take more to get the same effect, and some can have **withdrawal symptoms** when they stop. Many users say they spend lots of their time smoking it – or trying to find where to buy it. Doctors now believe it is as hard to stop smoking cannabis as it is to stop smoking tobacco.

Smokers speak out

“When I tried to stop smoking weed in the past and didn't manage to quit, I felt like it was the end of the world. I'd sink into a depression and get ridiculously stoned for weeks. When I hit rock bottom, I'd try to quit again.”



FACTS AND MYTHS

MYTH

Because it's a plant, it's harmless.

Tobacco is also a plant, and nobody thinks that's harmless! Smoking cannabis long-term has been linked to lung disease, including cancer. Again, more research is needed to understand the bigger picture, but most experts agree there is a risk.

MYTH

If you smoke cannabis, you'll end up using harder drugs.

Using cannabis in itself doesn't mean you'll have a craving for stronger drugs. However, lots of people who use other drugs also use cannabis. This means you might find yourself exposed to drugs such as ecstasy, cocaine and even heroin, depending on who you're using cannabis with. Also, it depends who you buy it from. Some dealers will want to persuade you to try other drugs so they can make more money from you.

MYTH

Cannabis today is 30 times stronger than it was in the 1960s and 1970s.

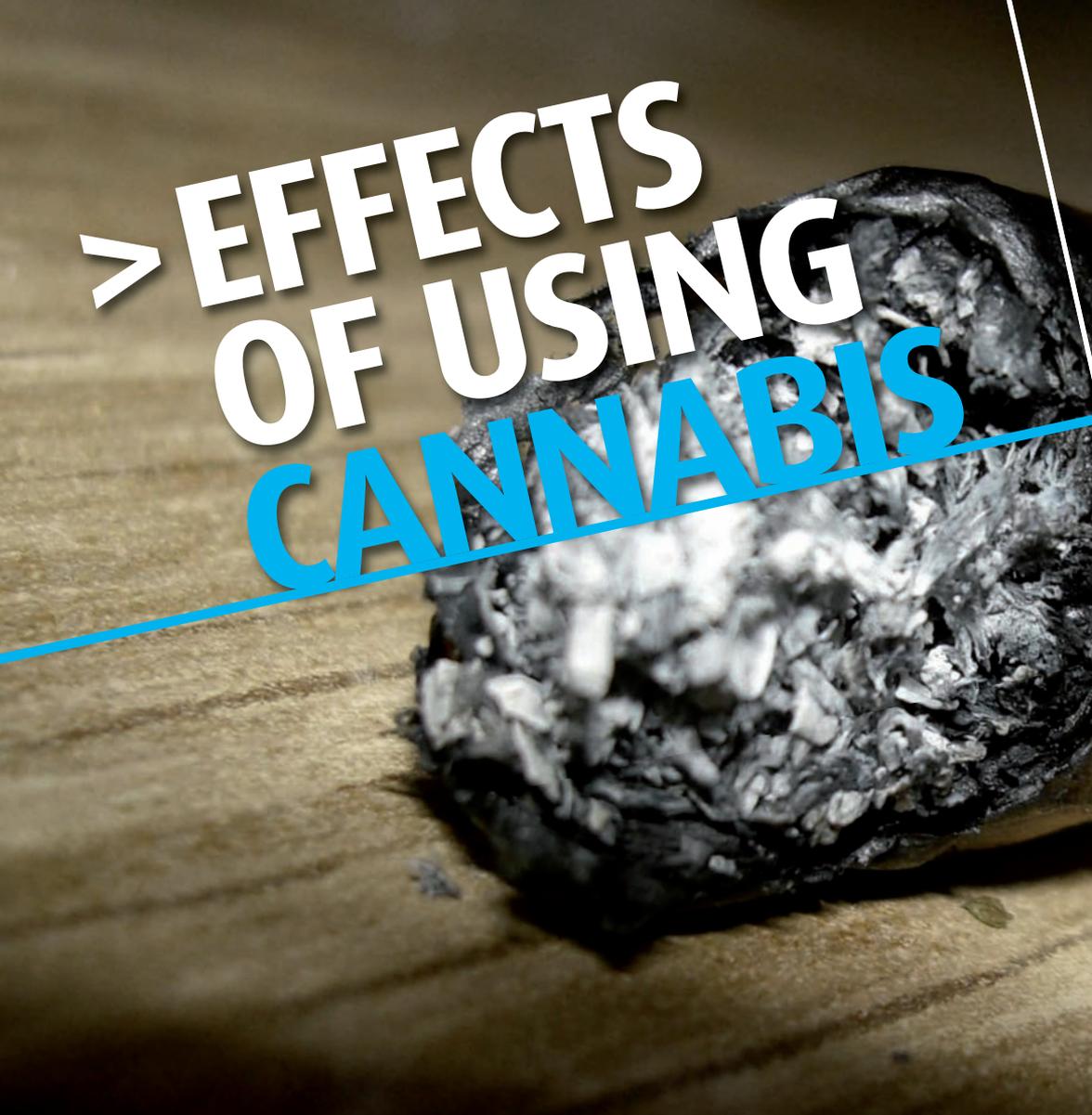
There is no doubt that skunk is stronger – but sometimes people will say that it is much stronger than it actually is. Most experts agree that what most people are smoking now is two or three times stronger than what was available 30 years ago. However, this still means the side-effects such as sickness and paranoia can be much more unpleasant.

Part 2: Cannabis and you

2

- Effects of using cannabis
- Signs of dependency

steps



> EFFECTS OF USING CANNABIS

People react differently to cannabis. You may experience all, some – or even none – of the effects below.

Some might just last for a short time. Others can be much longer-term.

- > FEELING SUSPICIOUS
- > FEELING ANXIOUS AND WORRIED
- > BEING LESS ABLE TO FOCUS
- > FORGETTING THINGS
- > HAVING STRANGE IDEAS
- > SEEING OR HEARING THINGS
- > CUTTING YOURSELF OFF FROM PEOPLE
- > FEELING LIFELESS
- > BEING CONFUSED
- > FEELING DIZZY
- > A RACING HEART
- > FEELING LIKE YOU CAN'T BREATHE
- > MOOD SWINGS
- > FEELING DOWN OR EVEN DEPRESSED
- > NOT DOING AS WELL AT WORK OR SCHOOL
- > MONEY PROBLEMS
- > ASTHMA
- > BRONCHITIS
- > EMPHYSEMA (BREATHING PROBLEMS)
- > LUNG PROBLEMS
- > LOSING TOUCH WITH REALITY
- > LOWER SPERM COUNT
- > TROUBLE GETTING PREGNANT



YOU CAN BECOME DEPENDENT ON CANNABIS, JUST AS YOU CAN WITH OTHER DRUGS.

Some people are able to use cannabis every so often without any big problems. But others can end up feeling like they're hooked. Even if there aren't any physical symptoms, like you might get with harder drugs, you can still have a mental dependency on it.

If you've been smoking cannabis for a short time, it's usually easier to stop. If you've been using it for longer, or smoke it regularly, it can be much harder.



**HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU'RE DEPENDENT ON IT?
HERE ARE THE MOST COMMON SIGNS:**

- **Using more cannabis than you had planned or using it for a longer time.**
- **Feeling like you always want to smoke it.**
- **Trying to stop using it but not being able to.**
- **Suffering from bad side-effects (see pages 16-17 for more details) but still being unable to stop using it.**
- **Spending lots of your life smoking cannabis, recovering from being stoned – and working out how to get hold of more of it.**
- **Cutting down doing other things – or even stopping them totally – so you can spend more time smoking cannabis.**
- **Having to use more and more cannabis just to get the same effect.**
- **Trying to stop using it but getting cravings, losing your appetite, having problems sleeping, having mood changes or feeling restless – to name just a few of the ways you might feel.**





Part 3: More information

3

- Cutting down
- Useful Contacts



steps

Cutting down

The Know Cannabis website - www.knowcannabis.org.uk - is designed to help you assess your cannabis use, its impact on your life and how to make changes if you want to.

FRANK is designed to give general drugs advice and help people to find drug and alcohol services throughout the UK. You can use the website www.talktofrank.com or call 0800 776 600 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Your **Community Addiction Team** may also be able to help. For more information, ask your GP or visit the online service directory at www.glasgowhelp.com and click on Alcohol, Drugs and Addiction.



Other Contacts

Glasgow Drug Crisis Centre

Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week

123 West Street

Glasgow

0141 420 6969

DrugScope - www.drugscope.org.uk - is designed to give you information on cannabis and other drugs.

Rethink - www.rethink.org - is a website with information on cannabis and mental health. This service also supports individuals with a mental illness, and their families and carers.

Know the Score - www.knowthescore.info - gives you facts about drugs, plus information and advice on drug issues in Scotland.

TheSite.org - www.thesite.org/drinkanddrugs - provides useful information and advice concerning addiction and dependency.

Release - www.release.org.uk - provides a range of services dedicated to meeting the needs of drug users and their family or carers.



This booklet is part of a series on common problems also available for download on www.glasgowsteps.com

**Controlling your stress
(anxiety and depression)**

**Wellbeing
(for teenagers)**

Panic Attacks

Health Anxiety

Phobias (General)

Agoraphobia

Coping with a death

Fatigue

Anger

**Alcohol and sensible
drinking**

Antidepressants

Insomnia

Relaxation

Self-esteem

Coping with trauma

Social anxiety

**Obsessive-Compulsive
Disorder**

Height Phobia

Coming Off

Antidepressants

**Five A Day To Keep You
Feeling Well**

All these booklets can be downloaded, free of charge, from www.glasgowsteps.com. Some are also available in printed form.