



Cannabasics

Harm Reduction



While the research is still evolving concerning the potential harms associated with cannabis consumption, the likelihood of developing a problematic relationship with cannabis (Cannabis Use Disorder or CUD) depends upon four factors:

// 01



LENGTH AND INTENSITY OF CONSUMPTION

longer, more intense consumption increases risk

// 02



POTENCY OF THE PRODUCT

consuming high levels of THC is more addictive

// 03



INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

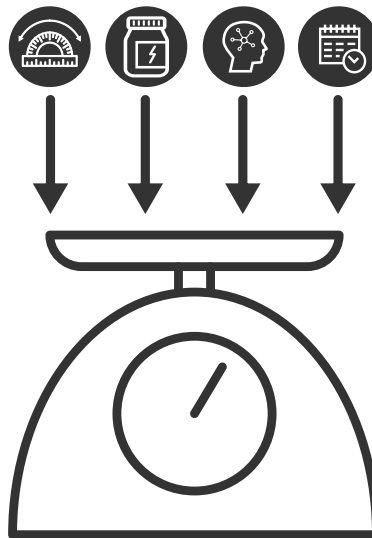
genetic factors or individual vulnerabilities, such as personality or experiences of trauma, can impact whether a person experiences harms

// 04



AGE OF INITIATION

people who begin to consume cannabis at a young age (under 16 years old) at a high frequency are at greater risk



The physical harms of cannabis can be greatly reduced by practicing basic harm reduction methods, such as those included in:

[Canada's Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#)

[Here to Help's Safer Cannabis Use](#)

[Take Care with Cannabis from Vancouver Coastal Health](#)

[Pregnancy Info](#)



Harm Reduction

RISKS

While the research is still evolving concerning the potential harms associated with cannabis consumption, the likelihood of developing a problematic relationship with cannabis (Cannabis Use Disorder or CUD) depends upon four factors:

- 01. Length and intensity of consumption:** longer, more intense consumption increases risk.
- 02. Potency of the product:** consuming high levels of THC is more addictive.
- 03. Individual factors:** genetic or individual vulnerabilities, such as personality or experiences of trauma, can impact whether a person experiences harms.
- 04. Age of initiation:** people who begin to consume cannabis at a young age (under 16 years old) at a high frequency are at greater risk.

Close to 1 in 10 people who use cannabis will develop an addiction to it, and this rises to about 1 in 6 for people who started using cannabis as a teenager.¹⁰ The path to Cannabis Use Disorder is individual. Two people who use the same method of consumption, at the same frequency, with the same potency of product, may result in one person developing a dependence and the other person experiencing minimal harms. The specific reasons for these individual elements are not yet well understood.

Frequent cannabis use is associated with a variety of adverse health outcomes. Certain people are more vulnerable to the potential physiological harms of cannabis, such as children and youth under the age of 25, a fetus in-utero or a nursing child, and those with a personal or family history of psychosis. Certain behaviours can elevate risk, such as mixing cannabis with alcohol or prescription drugs, driving after consuming cannabis (which elevates the risk of motor vehicle collisions) and co-consumption with tobacco (which may increase cancer risk and respiratory problems).¹¹

POTENTIAL HARMS

Some of the harms associated with cannabis include negative outcomes due to interactions with the criminal justice system that can result in insecure housing, trauma, and job instability. People experiencing social marginalization due to structural violence or the harms caused by systems and social institutions, including racialized persons, people with low incomes, people with mental health co-morbidities, or people who have experienced trauma, may disproportionately bear the burden of harms associated with cannabis consumption.¹²

Structural violence can compound the stress of social marginalization and result in poorer outcomes for Canadians. To reduce these harms, it is important to be sensitive to possible stigma and reframe language from “user” to “consumer”. To encourage conversation and reduce harms



Harm Reduction

of cannabis consumption, the term “person who consumes cannabis” is preferred over “stoner” or “pot head”. A simple change in language can help to increase service utilization and reduce perceptions of stigma by people who consume cannabis.

LINKS

For more information on anti-stigma and language, please see: Global Commission on Drug Policy. The World Drug Perception Problem 2017 Report: Countering prejudices about people who use drugs. (2017). Available at: http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/GCDP-Report-2017_Perceptions-ENGLISH.pdf

For more information on basic harm reduction methods see the following resources available on the Canadian Public Health Association website, under Resources (<https://www.cpha.ca/harm-reduction-health-promotion-and-cannabis-screening-tools>)

- Canada’s Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines
- Safer Cannabis Use
- Take Care with Cannabis

For more information on harm reduction, the Government of Canada has published a series of evidence briefs which are available on the Canadian Public Health Association website (<https://www.cpha.ca/federal>) including:

- Is cannabis safe to use? Facts for youth aged 13-17 years.
- Is cannabis safe to use? Facts for young adults aged 18-25 years.
- Does cannabis use increase the risk of developing psychosis or schizophrenia?
- Is cannabis safe during preconception, pregnancy and breastfeeding?
- Is cannabis addictive?

For more information on how cannabis interacts with alcohol and other prescription medications:

- Health Canada. Information for health care professionals: Cannabis (marihuana, marijuana) and the cannabinoids. 2018. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/information-medical-practitioners/information-health-care-professionals-cannabis-cannabinoids-eng.pdf>

- Wolters Kluwer. Lexicomp (Online). Interactions. Available from www.online.lexi.com. Accessed January 25, 2018.

REFERENCES

- 10 Government of Canada. Cannabis Health Effects (2018). Retrieved in Oct 2018 from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/campaigns/cannabis/health-effects.html>
- 11 Fischer B, et al. Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines: A Comprehensive Update of Evidence and Recommendations, Am J Public Health 2017;107(8):e1-e12. Retrieved in Oct 2018 from: <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303818>
- 12 Global Commission on Drug Policy. The World Drug Perception Problem 2017 Report: Countering prejudices about people who use drugs. (2017). Retrieved in Oct 2018 from: http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/GCDP-Report-2017_Perceptions-ENGLISH.pdf