

ALL ABOUT CANNABIS

TOUT SUR LE CANNABIS

All About Cannabis is a virtual presentation that engages and educates students with science-based information on the health and safety risks of cannabis use on mental health and brain function.

WHAT IS CANNABIS, ITS DIFFERENT PROPERTIES AND USES

Cannabis (weed, pot) is a drug that is often used for its effects on the mind and body. There are hundreds of chemicals found in cannabis. Some of these chemicals (cannabinoids) interact with receptors in the brain and body, which cause the stereotypical effects of cannabis.

THC (delta-9-tetra-hydro-cannabinol) causes the feeling of being “high”, along with a range of other effects. The higher the THC level, the greater the risk of experiencing these effects.

CBD (cannabidiol) doesn’t produce a high but can still have effects on the brain.

Cannabis consumption methods and the associated risks:

- **Smoking** – This is the most common way to use cannabis and the most harmful to the lungs.
- **Vaping** – While vaping cannabis may be less harmful than smoking for the lungs, there are still risks, and the long-term effects are unknown. Cannabis concentrates that are used for vaping are particularly risky to mental health due to the high THC levels.
- **Drinking and eating (edibles)** – Edible cannabis can come in many forms. The full effects of edible cannabis can be delayed up to 4 hours and can last for up to 12 hours. Eating or drinking more cannabis before the 4-hour mark can lead to very strong mental and physical effects, including vomiting and severe paranoia or anxiety, that may need urgent medical attention.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS AND LONG-TERM RISKS OF CANNABIS

While many people may associate cannabis with having positive effects on the body and mind (like feeling happy, excited or relaxed), there are also a range of potential negative effects. Everyone’s response to cannabis differs and can vary with each use.

Short-term effects may include:

- Changes in mood and feelings, causing emotions like sadness, anxiety, or panic, and in rare but severe cases, can trigger psychotic episodes requiring medical attention.
- Reduction in concentration and attention, impaired coordination, and slowed reaction time.
- Making it harder to learn, remember, pay attention, and make decisions.
- May impact the ability to perform at sports and other activities.
- Impacts the ability to drive.

Long-term effects may include:

- Developing and worsening symptoms of anxiety and depression. While some people may use cannabis to temporarily relieve stress and anxiety, long-term use can worsen mental health issues.
- Frequent use also impairs the dopamine system, which can negatively impact mood, energy and enthusiasm for activities.
- Daily or near daily use can lead to cannabis dependency, which can lead to cravings for more cannabis, increased tolerance and difficulty stopping use.
- Psychosis and schizophrenia, in rare but severe cases.



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ADDICTION AND STIGMA SURROUNDING CANNABIS USE

Throughout this presentation, your teen learned about addiction and stigma as it relates to cannabis use and cannabis use disorder. Building awareness and understanding of addiction and stigma can go a long way in helping to remove barriers to asking for help.

Addiction is when someone has a strong desire to do something again and again in a way that's hard to control or stop. An addiction to cannabis, or cannabis use disorder, can change the brain, causing individuals to crave and keep using cannabis, even when they want to stop or if their use causes problems for themselves or others, like family or friends.

Stigma refers to negative attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that we may have towards another person or group of people because of their situation in life. The stigma around addiction is especially harmful because it can make a person who is struggling with addiction feel isolated and make it harder for them to ask for help.

WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Instead of turning to cannabis for managing stress or mental health challenges, individuals are encouraged to adopt healthier habits that can help them cope with stress.

These healthy habits include:



Mindful deep breathing: Our brains and bodies need oxygen to feel calm, focused, and confident. Spending a few minutes a day focusing on breathing can make us more aware of our thoughts and emotions and slow down our racing mind.



Staying hydrated: What happens when you give water to a plant that's looking limp? It perks right up. So do our brains and bodies when we have enough H₂O. This helps maximize mental health and elevate mood.



Ensuring adequate sleep: How can you feel motivated, happy, excited, or up for stuff if you aren't getting the sleep you need? Aim for 8 to 10 hours per night.



Limiting social media use: Try to limit the time spent on social media platforms. Scientists have discovered that the more time spent on social media, the more mental health and brain performance suffers.



Engaging in physical activity: Doing so can help lower feelings of anxiety and depression and even help prevent mental health disorders from ever developing. This could include going outside for a walk, following a regular exercise routine, playing a team sport or going for a jog.*

*If physical activity is a challenge, listening to music, cooking or baking, or creating art, all trigger the release of the "feel-good" chemical dopamine and decreases the stress-causing hormone cortisol.

