

Cannabis, the common drug

“The killer with marijuana is the long term effects”

Blame it on Napoleon; he's the one who brought it back with him to Europe after exploitation and sorry adventures in the East.

Once favoured by the prudish Queen Victoria to treat her menstrual pains, cannabis was a popular drug of choice during the 19th century in Europe.

Big name French authors such as Victor Hugo and Aleixandre Dumas used the drug for pain relief. But as medical advances progressed, something called aspirin was invented and the purpose of marijuana became redundant.

Yet people kept using, enchanted by the drug's recreational use. Then, in the 20s and 30s a prohibitionist America gave cannabis a new name – marijuana. Linguistically the word marijuana comes from the Mexican Spanish terms marihuana, which refers to the plant's psychoactive use. In the 1930s, the drug was being used recreationally and its associated symptoms from heavy use, such as mental illness, were beginning to be recognised.

Jazz musicians in the 30s dabbled in it, as did much of the Beat generation. Popularity of the drug continued up to the swinging sixties, reaching a pinnacle of popularity with marijuana models such as Bob Dylan and John Lennon.

Cannabis is a depressant which slows the central nervous system. It contains more than 400 chemicals, with 61 providing a psychoactive effect. It is also the most widely used illicit drug in Victoria.

More than that, it seems to be on the rise, with 627 detections of it found at the

Australian border, according to the Crime Commissions' 2006/07 report.

Further, in 2006 and 2007, nearly 70 percent of all drug related arrests were for cannabis offences.

According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, "Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in Australia and generally easily available."

Cannabis is most prevalent amongst people in their 20s and 30s, with 55 percent of those aged 20 to 39 reporting cannabis use during their lives.

The false perception that cannabis is a soft, harmless drug may contribute to the wide usage of it amongst university students.

The drug contains powerful components, with the main active ingredient being delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol, commonly known as THC. This is the part of the plant that gives the 'high'.

Cannabis is usually smoked in hand rolled cigarettes (joints, spliffs, doobies) or can be inhaled through a pipe or bong. The latter can be bought from a speciality stoner shop or, glamorously, created from such items as a bottle, soft drink can or the nasty yet resourceful tool of a toilet paper roll.

Everyone experiences marijuana differently. Generally, however, some short term effects include: a general feeling of well-being, increased laughter and talkativeness, as well as a loss of inhibitions. The short-term effects may also conceal nausea, increase appetite, and impair co-ordination and cognitive ability. Drowsiness, along with anxiety and paranoia may occur. Physical effects may include bloodshot eyes and dryness of the eyes, mouth and throat.

Long-term effects are more serious. They may include an increased risk of respiratory diseases associated with smoking, including cancer, loss of memory function and a decrease in learning abilities, as

well as, no surprise here, the decreased motivation in areas of study, work and concentration.


Lastly – this one most of us have heard about – there's a strong link between cannabis use, dependency and mental health problems. The killers with marijuana are the long term effects, such as feelings of insularity, anti-socialism and mental illness.

As uni students, presumably, most of us will need a well functioning brain when we graduate. Not all stoners will be successful business people who invent something akin to a toaster that toasts bread while frying an egg or the less marketable bong that magically distributes Cheezels, perfect for combating those inevitable munchies and saving a walk to the kitchen.

Federally, the cultivation, possession, use and supply of cannabis is illegal throughout Australia, as is its importation. Yet state-by-state laws vary, with laws slowly updating and moving to the decriminalisation of marijuana.

Here in Victoria, the laws are much softer for possessing a small amount of marijuana; a first or second time offender might get a warning, but they are tough on the cultivation for commercial purposes.

Just don't expect the same legal liberty when visiting very marijuana conservative countries like Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. Here punishments for cannabis extend greatly past a 'slap on the wrist' and can attract a life sentence or the death penalty.

For more information, contact the Cannabis Information and Helpline on 1800 30 40 50, which is a telephone counselling service operated by trained professionals. Other numbers to call for help include the VIC DirectLine on 1800 888 236 and Victorian Drug User Group/VIVAIDS: 9329 1500. 

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