

SWANSEA DRUG NOTES NO. 1
CANNABIS
(blow, dope, grass, weed, hash, herb, resin)

CANNABIS

Cannabis remains the most commonly used of all the illegal drugs in Swansea. Surveys suggest that over 2 million people regularly smoke cannabis in the UK. Of the 49% of 16–29 year olds who admit to trying drugs most (87%) have used only cannabis.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Cannabis comes in two main forms – the dried leaves and flowers of the cannabis plant (herb) which look like dried herbs. Alternatively it can come in brown (from yellow to black) resinous material (hashish).

Very rarely it is also available as oil.

The bulk of cannabis is imported into this country from warmer climates – Morocco, Pakistan, Thailand, Mexico, Colombia, Jamaica etc. Increasing numbers of individuals also try to grow their own. (Over 70% of regular smokers have tried to grow their own). Cannabis also has an especially distinctive sweet smell, especially when smoked.

HOW IT IS USED

Cannabis is most commonly smoked – on its own or with tobacco – in hand rolled cigarettes. These have been known as ‘reefers’, ‘joints’ and ‘spliffs’. Resin can be smoked in a small pipe. Other arrangements include water pipe/ hot knives/ chillum etc.

The ‘bong’ is especially popular in South Wales. This is a tubular pipe – often home made. A mixture of tobacco and cannabis (‘a mull or mix’) is put in the broad based bowl and individuals inhale the smoke through a smaller bored tube on the side. Cannabis can also be eaten (Hashish is sometimes eaten raw). Cannabis can also be made into cakes, biscuits, fudge and the like. It can also be made into tea.

WHAT THE EFFECTS ARE

Smoking is a quick and effective way to take the drug. Initially people feel relaxed and lethargic. Sights and sounds become enhanced, appetite is increased (the ‘munchies’). Everyday discussion can seem both meaningful and hilarious.

Some people will feel nauseous and anxious. Some will feel paranoid.

When eaten the effects take much longer to start. The effects and side effects can also be far more intense.

Cannabis affects perception of time and space and will affect driving.

Cannabis also affects short-term memory.

HOW LONG IT STAYS IN THE BODY

Cannabis stays in the body a very long time. Traces may be found in urine for up to 4 weeks in heavy smokers.

Despite the fact that it is traceable for some weeks, it is not actually psychoactive after 24 hours.

LONGER TERM EFFECTS

Cannabis is thought to be carcinogenic and more likely to cause lung problems than tobacco.

There is much dispute about the so-called 'amotivational syndrome'. This is the belief that regular cannabis use causes people to become lethargic and to lose interest.

MEDICAL USE

A number of groups have suggested that cannabis may help in a range of diseases including AIDS, MS, arthritis, glaucoma as well as in the relief of some types of pain, for the relief of nausea etc.

A number of research projects have been undertaken to evaluate this – most trying to refine active ingredients rather than use herbal cannabis.

Cannabis was used extensively in medicine up until the early 20th century and was not taken off medical prescription until the 1960s.

Risks and Help

The Law – Cannabis is a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971). It is illegal to possess, or supply. Supplying an illegal drug includes the sharing of drugs and the giving of drugs – there does not need to be a commercial motive for supply to be proved.

It is also illegal to allow anyone else to smoke cannabis on premises that you control.

Accidents – Using cannabis may increase the likelihood of risk taking behaviour. It will also affect the ability to drive or use any other complicated machinery.

Other Help for New Users – Drugs education can be helpful if given carefully as part of a well thought out package. In addition encouraging other activities that involve risk and excitement may help young people. Learn to talk and to listen without lecturing. Remember most cannabis smokers never become heavy users of other drugs.

Regular Users

Financial – Regular cannabis use may begin to be quite expensive.

Amotivational Syndrome – Some people believe that regular users are likely to be lethargic and unable to undertake day to day tasks involving motivation and energy.

Other Help for Regular Users

Dependent cannabis users tend to treat the drug as a tranquilliser and become anxious and agitated if faced with abstinence. Some suffer insomnia as a result of abstinence.

Consider what other ways relaxation can be achieved and anxiety allayed.

Consider self-help detoxification or planned reduction of use.

Consider alternative prescribed help (short-term only).

Encourage alternative activity and self-esteem measures.

Build exercise, diet and educational/vocational factors.

Swansea Drugs Notes

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