

Asthma & cannabis



**Asthma
Australia**

Consumer Fact Sheet

This fact sheet tells you about the link between asthma and smoking cannabis. Most people know that smoking tobacco is not good for their bodies. This is the case for smoking cannabis too.

Asthma is a condition that affects the airways and makes it hard to breathe.

Research studies show that cannabis smoke can increase asthma symptoms and make breathing more difficult.

Smoking cannabis has been shown to:

- Increase mucus in the airways
- Increase the number of glands that produce mucus
- Damage the airway walls
- Cause swelling in the airways.

Let's look at cannabis smoke

Cannabis smoke contains harmful chemicals including carcinogenic compounds (these are known to cause cancer) – even more than tobacco smoke.

These chemicals damage the lungs and stop them from working properly.

We know this damage is increased in people smoking cannabis because of the longer, deeper breaths taken in with smoking cannabis, compared to tobacco.

People with asthma, who smoke cannabis, have more symptoms (feel worse, more often) and their asthma medications do not work as well.

Does cannabis smoke affect other people breathing it in?

There is little research available yet on the impact of cannabis smoke on other people. However, given that cannabis smoke contains higher levels of harmful chemicals than tobacco smoke it is recommended that precautions be taken, particularly around children and people with asthma, lung and heart issues.

Other health issues

Smoking cannabis is associated with many other health issues, including a higher risk of heart problems and strokes.

Mental health issues are strongly linked with smoking cannabis, in particular addiction, psychosis and schizophrenia.

This means that smoking cannabis is known to affect your physical and mental health.

Did you know?

- 1 in 3 Australians have smoked cannabis
- 1 in 10 people in Australia have asthma
- People with asthma are more likely to take days off work, school or study
- People who smoke cannabis are more likely to do poorly at school and have more time off work
- Smoking cannabis worsens asthma symptoms and regular users are more likely to experience heart and mental health issues.

Breathing

Most of us know that smoking tobacco is bad for our health, particularly our lungs. Asthma affects our breathing and our lungs.

If you smoke cannabis, you may not be aware how this affects your lungs, and your asthma symptoms.

When people have asthma their airways narrow, caused by:

- Airways swelling
- Airways becoming thick with mucus and
- Muscles around the airways squeezing tight.

This is why it is difficult for people with asthma to breathe.

This means that the space in the airway that air travels through is reduced due to the swelling and extra mucus.

You might recognise the symptoms that show you this is happening in your lungs:

- Feeling out of breath
- Tightness in the chest
- Wheezing
- Frequent coughing
- In the daytime or being woken at night by these unpleasant symptoms.

Smoking cannabis increases these symptoms, and means you are more likely to have an asthma flare-up, or sudden or severe asthma attack.

There is no evidence supporting the use of cannabis in treating asthma in the long term.

Please turn over >

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If you do have any of these asthma symptoms, see your doctor for a lung health check.

You can get help to quit smoking cannabis

Having the facts may help you make the decision to quit. You may be interested in quitting, and unsure of the support and assistance available to you. As with quitting tobacco, stopping smoking cannabis can be difficult, and most people try many times before they quit for good.

Support is available.

Your doctor and pharmacist are able to provide you with support and information – ask them how.

National Cannabis Information and Helpline – provides free counseling – 1800 30 40 50

You may prefer to look at the web-based treatment called *Reduce Your Use* at

www.ncpic.org.au

ncpic

national cannabis
prevention and
information centre

Quitting smoking cannabis will reduce your asthma symptoms.

Your asthma medication will work better – so you will feel better.

Asthma Assist

Register with Asthma Assist to receive free asthma information from your local Asthma Foundation

asthmaaustralia.org.au
1800 ASTHMA