

RISK AND RESILIENCE ^o

CANNABIS

KNOWLEDGE // UNDERSTANDING // RESPONSE

WHAT IS IT?

The cannabis plant is native to central and south Asia. It has been used for thousands of years recreationally and as a traditional medicine. It contains 483 known compounds, including THC (**tetrahydrocannabinol**), CBD (**cannabidiol**), and 63 other cannabinoids. Humans have what is called an Endocannabinoid system. This means that THC, CBD, and other cannabinoids impact on our CB1 receptors (**in our brain**) and our CB2 receptors (**mainly around the body**). When smoked, the desire is for the person to feel relaxed, calm, connected, sociable and positive. However, it can make people feel anxious, paranoid, confused and disorientated.

IS THE STUFF ON THE STREETS CLASSIC CANNABIS?

Probably not. The cannabis on the UK streets tends not to be classic cannabis or cannabis resin, but instead a more potent form, often grouped together as 'Skunk'. Unlike naturally grown cannabis, this product tends to have much higher levels of THC which increases the likelihood of negative side effects. These products have been altered by humans to be much stronger and is not what you find growing in the wild. It has been estimated that almost **94%** of cannabis on UK streets is Skunk cannabis.

Did you know? Cannabis resin refers to the sticky, brown parts of cannabis that are found on the trichomes (the bits hanging off the leaves) of a cannabis plant.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER TYPES OF CANNABINOIDS?

Scientists have been making synthetic cannabinoids since the 1980s. Originally these were being developed to create medicines, but the research didn't really take off. However, in the early 2000s, people found that you could get around the law by creating synthetic cannabinoids into a product that could be sold as an alternative to cannabis – with some people believing they were safer as you could buy them in a shop. These were often marketed as "**Spice**", "**Mamba**" or under other brand names. The law changed in 2016, but by then, dealers realised how much could be made from these products and started selling them in prisons and to vulnerable people who were homeless as a cheap and powerful drug to help people deal with their challenging situations.

Did you know? Some strains have been found to be as much as 800% stronger than classic cannabis. They have also been found in vaping products, edibles and in cannabis resin.

WHAT ABOUT VAPING AND EDIBLES?

Cannabis edibles are food products which contain THC. They are illegal but available in many different forms, including cakes, sweets, chocolates, drinks, syrups, butters or spreads and oils. When eating cannabis, it takes a lot longer to hit and can stay in your system for a lot longer than smoking it.

THC vape juice is illegal in the UK. Currently, CBD oil is legal to sell in the UK, and this includes the sale of CBD vape juice. However, UK law dictates that any CBD oil sold must contain no nicotine. However, non-UK websites and some social media accounts find ways around and actively sell them. This is before we consider the Dark Web.

The challenge with both vaping and edibles is that there is no guarantee they will contain genuine THC products, especially if purchased online. Why? Well genuine THC products are expensive to produce, and dealers can make much more money selling vapes and edibles that contain synthetic cannabinoids (like in Spice).

Did you know? Cannabis takes longer to hit when smoked as it needs to work its way through the digestive system. It needs to be digested by your stomach before being metabolized by your liver. This produces more psychoactive effects and could lead you to feel high for 8 hours or more.

WHAT IS THE LEGALITY?

Whatever your views are on cannabis, it is important to be aware of the facts. As of 2024, the following is the legality:

| | | |
|----------------|--|--|
| Class B | Possession: up to 5 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both. | Supply: up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both |
|----------------|--|--|

Since 2018, cannabis can be legally prescribed for conditions such as:

- **Children and adults with rare, severe forms of epilepsy.**
- **Adults with vomiting or nausea caused by chemotherapy.**
- **People with muscle stiffness and spasms caused by multiple sclerosis (MS).**

It would only be considered when other treatments were not suitable or had not helped. You can also be prescribed this privately, but this can cost a lot of money. Simply put, if you are not prescribed it by a medical professional, you cannot claim it is for medicinal use and you can face prosecution.

Did you know? A lot of people who feel addicted to cannabis use might be struggling with nicotine addiction. Tobacco is often used in joints and nicotine can be physically addictive whereas cannabis is psychologically addictive – a powerful combination.

MYTH CHALLENGING

- **I should be able to handle cannabis!** Cannabis is a powerful psychoactive substance that can cause a dependency on anyone that uses it on a regular basis.
- **Cannabis is a gateway drug!** It is often seen as this, but it is wrong to think that anyone who uses cannabis will end up using different substances. If someone is willing to take risks with cannabis, then perhaps they might be tempted to take risks with other substances – but not always.
- **Cannabis is safer than other drugs!** Cannabis is very socially acceptable, and the belief is that it is not as harmful as other drugs. As with any drug, it is how you use it that can cause the harm. Using any psychoactive substance daily can lead to problems.

USING OR NOT USING?

Perhaps there is another way. There is a concept called harm reduction. This is the idea that some people don't want to stop using but are willing to explore ways to reduce the potential harm from their use. This is not about telling people what to do but rather it is about exploring options though conversation and evidence.

"Harm reduction is grounded in justice and human rights. It focuses on positive change and on working with people without judgement, coercion, discrimination, or requiring that people stop using drugs as a precondition of support."

Source: hri.global

HOW CAN I KEEP MYSELF SAFE?

IF SMOKING CANNABIS/SKUNK:

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Consider alternatives to tobacco in your joints – you can buy non-nicotine smoking mixtures online. | Sprinkle small amounts in your joint – especially when you have not used in a while. | Try and limit using in a bong or bucket as it is harder to regulate what you breathe in. |
| Use a long roach made from uncoloured cardboard. | Avoid mixing with other drugs – including alcohol and medication. | Try and have days off from using. Anything we use daily can lead us to feeling dependent on it. |

IF VAPING: *Vaping tobacco is safer than smoking cigarettes, but cannabis in vapes can be very unpredictable and may instead contain synthetic cannabinoids.*

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Use small amounts every time – there is no guarantee it is genuine cannabis. | Take breaths between lungful's to allow your body to recover. | Avoid using everyday like you would tobacco. The more you use, the more you form a psychological dependence to it. |
|---|--|---|

IF USING EDIBLES:

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Use very small amounts and do not re-dose for a long while. Some products can take hours to hit. | Expect stronger effects than smoking or vaping. Use in safe environments with people you trust. | Trips can last 8 hours or more. Be careful when you use and consider what you might need to do in a few hours' time. |
|---|--|---|

Did you know? Since 2015 there has been a specific offence for Drug Driving – including cannabis. Be especially careful if you eat it and you plan to drive in a few hours – you may still be heavily under the influence.

Another way to keep yourself safe is to get things tested, especially if you feel the product you bought isn't what you think it is. There is a service called WEDINOS that will test something for free for you. Find out more at: www.wedinos.org.

WHAT IF I WANT TO MAKE SOME CHANGES TO MY USE? **THREE SESSIONS**

The following is an approach you can take on your own, with a friend or family member or perhaps with a support worker. It is designed to be completed over three sessions, roughly about a week apart. Be honest with yourself and make the changes that **YOU** want to make.

SESSION 1 – SCREENING/DIARY

The first session is about your use. Before you can think about making changes, you need to be honest with your use. Do you use other things? Does your use affect other parts of your life?

SESSION 2 – TRIGGERS/IDENTITY

What makes you likely to use? What could you do differently? How does cannabis fit in with your identity?

SESSION 3 – CHALLENGE OF CHANGE/GOAL

What is going to be a challenge for you to make changes? How can you make a goal that will work for you?

How am I *feeling* at this stage?

SESSION 1: SCREENING. Do you...

Smoke anything other than tobacco?

yes

no

Vape anything other than tobacco?

yes

no

Sniff/snort any powder?

yes

no

Swallow any pills/pellets that's not prescribed to you?

yes

no

Inject anything that's not prescribed to you?

yes

no

Inhale any gas/glue/aerosol?

yes

no

Drink alcohol/any liquid that gets you high?

yes

no

| | | No | Yes |
|----|--|----|-----|
| 1 | Answered yes to any of the above questions. (If no, end screening here) | 0 | 1 |
| 2 | Do you use more than one substance at a time? | 0 | 1 |
| 3 | Are you unable to stop using when you want to? | 0 | 1 |
| 4 | Have you had "blackouts" or "flashbacks" because of your use? | 0 | 1 |
| 5 | Do you ever feel bad or guilty about your use? | 0 | 1 |
| 6 | Do those closest to you ever complain about your involvement with substances? | 0 | 1 |
| 7 | Have you neglected your friends/family because of your use? | 0 | 1 |
| 8 | Have you engaged in illegal activities to obtain substances? | 0 | 1 |
| 9 | Have you ever experienced withdrawal symptoms (felt ill) when you stopped taking anything? | 0 | 1 |
| 10 | Have you had medical problems because of your use (e.g., memory loss, hepatitis, convulsions, bleeding, etc.)? | 0 | 1 |

Score

| Score | Level | Suggested Action |
|-------|-----------|---|
| 1-2 | Low | Indicates you are using on occasions or recreationally. |
| 3-5 | Moderate | Perhaps your use is getting to be a challenge for you. |
| 6-8 | High | It suggests your use is becoming a problem and you should consider changes. |
| 9-10 | Very High | Consider making changes and see a medical professional for more support. |

DIARY

Monitor your use over a week. Note down when you used, how it felt before you used and how you felt after you have used:

| | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| MONDAY | When I used | How I felt before | How I felt after |
| TUESDAY | When I used | How I felt before | How I felt after |
| WEDNESDAY | When I used | How I felt before | How I felt after |
| THURSDAY | When I used | How I felt before | How I felt after |
| FRIDAY | When I used | How I felt before | How I felt after |
| SATURDAY | When I used | How I felt before | How I felt after |
| SUNDAY | When I used | How I felt before | How I felt after |

SESSION 2 – TRIGGERS

Reflect about the week you have recorded. Look through what you wrote and see if you identify your triggers for using, both good and bad.

Positive triggers: *Such as for fun, being sociable, to chill out*

Negative triggers: *Such as boredom, feeling stressed, habit*

What could I do to respond to these triggers in a different way? *Such as other ways to socialise, alternative ways to chill out or other fun interests.*

What could I do to respond to these triggers in a different way? *Such as ways to handle boredom, finding other stress relieving tools, challenging the habit.*

When faced with triggers, consider some ways you could respond to them. Some examples are mindfulness, grounding techniques or self-soothing techniques:

MINDFULNESS – ACCEPTS TECHNIQUE

Activities: Engage in an activity, and this can be just about any healthy activity. Read a book, make, go for a walk, call your friend, wash the dishes. Anything that keeps you busy and keeps your mind off the negative emotion will help.

Contributing: Do something kind for another person. Giving service can help you relieve emotional distress in a couple ways. An act of service is also an activity that, as mentioned above, will help get your mind off the problem at hand.

Comparisons: Put your life in perspective. Is there a time when you've faced more difficult challenges than you're facing today? Use this skill to add a different perspective to what you're experiencing right now.

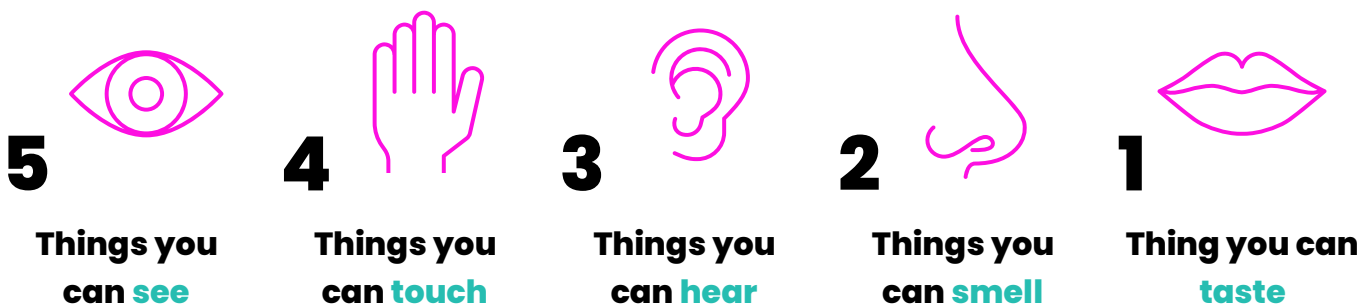
Emotions: You have the power to invoke the opposite emotion of your current distressed feeling. If you are feeling anxious, practice meditation for 15 minutes. Adding a dose of the opposite emotion helps reduce the intensity of the negative emotion.

Push Away: When you can't deal with something just yet, it's okay to push the problem out of your mind temporarily. You can push away by distracting yourself with other activities, thoughts, or mindfulness.

Thoughts: Replace negative, anxious thoughts with activities that busy your mind. These distractions can help you avoid self-destructive behaviour until you're able to achieve emotion regulation.

Sensation: Use your five senses to self-soothe during times of distress.

GROUNDING: *when feeling triggered, look around the room and identify...*



SELF-SOOTHING

You can prepare for triggers by having a range of techniques stored in a shoe box or other small box or bag for when you need to deal with the trigger. Basing them on your senses can help keep a range of triggers at bay.

Things you can **look at** to keep you safe:
mindfulness books,
relaxing youtube videos,
going out into nature

Things you can **touch or play with** to keep you safe: fidget toys, drawing or doodling, feeling the textures of nature

Things you can **listen to** calm you: podcasts, music, ASMR sounds, guided meditations, mantras, listening to nature

Things you can **smell** to relax you:
aromatherapy,
candles,
perfumes, in nature

Things you can **taste**: food, drink, but avoid alcohol and limit caffeine and unhealthy snacks

IDENTITY – HOW DOES CANNABIS FIT WITH YOUR IDENTITY?

Using something like cannabis regularly can mean it becomes part of your identity. Making changes can be hard when it is part of who you are. Consider the following questions:

How does cannabis relate
to my *identity*?

How do I use cannabis
with others?

How do *others* see my
cannabis use?

What do I *not* want to
change about me?

What do I *want* to change about me?

Reflect about the previous week. How did you feel about your triggers? Did you manage to handle them differently?

| What triggers did you notice? | How did you handle them? |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | |

Time to make some choices... do you want to make a change? Are you ready to make a change?

HOW CONFIDENT AM I OF MAKING A CHANGE?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Not very confident Very confident

HOW COMMITTED AM I TO MAKING A CHANGE?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Not very committed Very committed

HOW CAPABLE AM I TO MAKE A CHANGE?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Not very capable Very capable

GOAL SETTING – MAKE A PACT.

MY GOAL IS:

| | | | |
|----------|-------------------|---|---|
| P | Purposeful | Make sure your goal has a long-term effect. | How is this goal <i>purposeful</i> ? |
| A | Actionable | Your goal should be based on things you can control. | How is this goal <i>actionable</i> ? |
| C | Continuous | Be consistent and take one step at a time to reach the outcome | How is this goal <i>continuous</i> ? |
| T | Trackable | Being able to identify moments where you can see change. | How is this goal <i>trackable</i> ? |

My notes – use this part to note anything down that might help on your journey or just to doodle some thoughts or ideas:

REFERENCES:

- Screening tool adapted from DAST-10 (1982)
- Harm Reduction International: hri.global
- WEDINOS testing: www.wedinos.org
- ACCEPTS based on the DBT technique of: The Wise Mind ACCEPTS – <https://dbt.tools>

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