



Australian Government
Department of Defence

Cannabis

Defence Mental Health & Wellbeing





*'Mental health and wellbeing is the state in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stress of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'**

Defence's vision is that our people – military and public servants – experience positive mental health and wellbeing. *They are Fit to Fight – Fit to Work – Fit for Life.*

*World Health Organization

What is cannabis?

Cannabis is a depressant drug, as it slows down the function of the central nervous system, such as the messages travelling between the brain and body. Cannabis is also classed as a hallucinogen, as when it is taken in large doses, it may produce hallucinogenic effects. The main psychoactive component in cannabis is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC potency varies in different cannabis products.

Cannabis is generally used in three forms: marijuana, hashish and hash oil. Marijuana is the dried leaves of the plant and is usually smoked. Hashish is made from the resin of the plant which is dried, pressed and smoked. It can also be added to food and eaten. Hash oil, the most potent cannabis product, is thick oil obtained from hashish.

Common questions about cannabis use

Can you become 'addicted' to cannabis?

There are multiple aspects of addiction including the physical, the social and psychological/emotional factors. Long-term cannabis use may eventually lead to physical dependence. Being dependent on a drug means that a person needs to keep using to avoid the unpleasant effects of withdrawal. There is clear evidence of cannabis withdrawal, with symptoms including:

- anxiety
- irritability
- aggression
- cravings for cannabis
- loss of appetite
- sweating
- chills and tremors
- restless sleep, and
- nightmares.

These symptoms can vary from one week to two months after ceasing cannabis use.

Is there a link between cannabis and mental health?

People with a family history of mental illness are more likely to experience anxiety, depression and psychotic symptoms after using cannabis. Psychotic symptoms include delusions, hallucinations, and seeing or hearing things that do not exist or are distorted.

Effects of cannabis

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries risk. Cannabis affects everyone differently, based on:

- size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount taken
- the strength of the drug.

The effects of cannabis may be felt immediately if smoked, or within an hour or two if eaten and effects may include:

- feeling relaxed and sleepy
- spontaneous laughter and excitement
- increased appetite
- dry mouth
- quiet and reflective mood.

People may also experience:

- trouble concentrating
- blurred vision
- clumsiness
- slower reflexes
- bloodshot eyes
- seeing and hearing things that aren't there
- increased heart rate
- low blood pressure
- mild anxiety and paranoia
- long-term effects.

Regular use of cannabis may cause:

- memory loss
- learning difficulties
- mood swings
- regular colds or flu
- reduced sex drive
- difficulty having children
- needing to use more to get the same effect
- dependence on cannabis
- financial, work and social problems.

Smoking cannabis can also cause:

- sore throat
- asthma
- bronchitis
- cancer (particularly if smoked with tobacco).

Medicinal cannabis

Broadly speaking, medicinal cannabis is cannabis prescribed to relieve the symptoms of a medical condition, such as epilepsy. It is important to make the distinction between medicinal cannabis and recreational cannabis. Recently legislation has been passed in Australia to facilitate access to medicinal cannabis for certain medical conditions. It is unlikely that a current serving ADF member would be prescribed medicinal cannabis for any of the approved Therapeutic Goods Administration conditions such as spasticity due to Multiple Sclerosis.

Synthetic Cannabinoid Products ('Synthetic Cannabis')

Synthetic cannabis is a new psychoactive substance that was originally designed to mimic or produce similar effects to cannabis. However, some of the newer substances claiming to be synthetic cannabis do not actually mimic the effects of THC.

Reports suggest it also produces additional negative effects. These powdered chemicals are mixed with solvents and added to herbs and sold in colourful, branded packets. The chemicals usually vary from batch to batch as manufacturers try to stay ahead of the law, so different packets can produce different effects even if the name and branding on the package looks the same.

Workplace considerations

The ADF has a zero tolerance policy on the use of illicit drugs by its members. This means that any member found to be using illicit drugs will be required to 'show cause' why they should be permitted to remain in the ADF.

The ADF conducts random and targeted drug testing of ADF members. Both cannabis and its synthetic variations are tested for in the Prohibited Substance Testing Program and cannabis is the most commonly detected drug. Cannabis remains detectable in urine for some time after use, so a person could return a positive test up to 10 weeks after they have used cannabis.

The APS People Policy states that the Commonwealth has a legislative requirement to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and includes providing protection from drug and alcohol related hazards or incidents.

Where to seek help

If you or someone in your workplace is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call **Emergency Services 000**, contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information – 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

- Emergency on **000**
- Lifeline on **13 11 14**
- Suicide Call Back Service on **1300 659 467**.

ADF

Contact your local on base Health Centre, Mental Health Professional or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal is an online health information resource tool for ADF members and their families www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support.

Military Chaplains are connected to all ships/units/bases around Australia and on Operations. They can provide all-hours support and appropriate referral. To access Defence Chaplaincy support, call **1300 333 362** and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain from your area and service.

The ADF Mental Health All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on **1800 628 036** or if calling from overseas **+61 2 9425 3878**.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call **1800 IMSICK (1800 467 425)** to locate the nearest support.

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608) The Defence Family Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists. Defence Community Organisation website is: www.defence.gov.au/dco

The National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC)

Serving Families of Deployed Australian Defence Personnel.
As part of the Headquarters Joint Operations Command, the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) provides a 24 hour support, referral and information service for families of Defence personnel deployed on operations and exercises. **1800 801 026** or **+ 61 2 6127 1812**.

Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Office (SeMPRO)

SeMPRO offers advice, guidance and support to current and former Defence personnel who have been affected by sexual misconduct, whether the incident is current or historical.

This includes support to ADF cadets, officers and instructors of cadets, APS personnel, commanders, managers, supervisors, support people and families affected by sexual misconduct. **1800 736 776 (1800SeMPRO)**.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling (formerly WVCS): is a national mental health service that provides 24-hour free and confidential counselling, group programs and suicide prevention training for current and ex-serving ADF members, and their family. To get support or to find out more, call **1800 011 046** or visit www.OpenArms.gov.au

APS (and Reservists)

Defence Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (including the Reserve Assistance Program – RAP). The EAP provides short term confidential counselling and support for employees and immediate family members (if eligible). It is easily accessible, voluntary and can provide support on a range of personal and work related issues. The Defence EAP can be accessed by calling **1300 687 327**.