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# CANNABIS

## AKA 'DAGGA'

### what is cannabis?

Cannabis is the most commonly abused illicit drug in South Africa. It is a dry, shredded green and brown mix of flowers, stems, seeds, and leaves derived from the hemp plant *Cannabis sativa*. The main active chemical in cannabis is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol; THC for short.

### how is cannabis abused?

Cannabis is usually smoked as a cigarette (joint) or in a pipe. It is also smoked in blunts, which are cigars that have been emptied of tobacco and refilled with cannabis. Since the blunt retains the tobacco leaf used to wrap the cigar, this mode of delivery combines cannabis's active ingredients with nicotine and other harmful chemicals. Cannabis can also be mixed in food or brewed as a tea. As a more concentrated, resinous form it is called hashish, and as a sticky black liquid, hash oil. \* Cannabis smoke has a pungent and distinctive, usually sweet-and-sour odour.



### Addictive Potential

Long-term cannabis abuse can lead to addiction; that is, compulsive drug seeking and abuse despite its known harmful effects upon social functioning in the context of family, school, work, and recreational activities. Long-term cannabis abusers trying to quit report irritability, sleeplessness, decreased appetite, anxiety, and drug craving, all of which make it difficult to quit. These withdrawal symptoms begin within about 1 day following abstinence, peak at 2-3 days, and subside within 1- or 2-weeks following drug cessation.

### what effects does it have on the brain?

Scientists have learned a great deal about how THC acts in the brain to produce its many effects. When someone smokes cannabis, THC rapidly passes from the lungs into the bloodstream, which carries the chemical to the brain and other organs throughout the body.

Not surprisingly, Cannabis intoxication can cause distorted perceptions, impaired coordination, difficulty in thinking and problem solving, and problems with learning and memory. Research has shown that Cannabis's adverse impact on learning and memory can last for days or weeks after the acute effects of the drug wear off.