



SKUNK



→ THIS IS A
BOOKLET
ABOUT SKUNK

→ IT PROVIDES
INFORMATION ON
POTENCY/HEALTH
ISSUES/DEPENDENCY/
AND TIPS ON HOW TO
CUT DOWN OR STOP.

What is Skunk?

Skunk is a type of female, seedless cannabis plant, which is the result of cross-breeding two varieties of cannabis called Cannabis Sativa and Cannabis Indica, although there are also other combinations of plant which are referred to as Skunk.

When combined these two plants provide the best characteristics for artificial growing and THC content, which can range from 6% to 20%.

The term 'Skunk' is often used to describe any leaf-based, strong smelling herbal cannabis. For the purposes of this booklet we have used the term to refer to indoor farmed herbal cannabis, grown in the UK.

How common is Skunk?

Over the last decade skunk has become the most common type of cannabis in the UK and accounts for nearly 70% of all cannabis smoked.

Most of the Skunk used in this country has been grown on indoor farms, producing commercial quantities of plants, under artificial lights and soil based pots. Less than 10% of Skunk is grown using the more advanced hydroponic growing systems, which grow plants in nutrient rich water systems.



The bits that get you stoned

The cannabis plant contains over 480 natural elements. 60 of these have been classed as elements which occur only in the cannabis plant and are called cannabanoids.

Of these, two elements, THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (cannabidiol) are the main players.

THC gives you a feeling of euphoria and being high, while CBD causes drowsiness, and the 'can't be bothered moving' stoned feeling. THC also contributes to the feelings of paranoia and anxiety you can sometimes feel when smoking skunk. It is believed that CBD can act as a brake for the THC and takes some of the edge of its effects. Skunk contains very low levels of CBD.

Although the evidence is unproven on CBD, if you are having panic attacks or feeling edgy or anxious and are going to continue smoking cannabis try switching to resin (Hash) which has much higher levels of CBD. See if it works for you.

How strong is Skunk

'30 times stronger' and 'Mad Skunk' are some of the lurid headlines in the media concerning the potency of herbal cannabis and how much stronger it is today than in the past.

According to a recent government report, the average potency for factory-farmed herbal cannabis in the UK was 15% an increase from 13.98% reported in 2004. Although there have been some samples reported which have been higher than this average, the thirty times stronger claim seems somewhat exaggerated.

Strength and potency are two different things. The term potency is normally used to describe the amount of THC, usually expressed as a percentage (by weight), within the resin which covers the cannabis plant (see the image on the next page).

You could have high potency but very a small amount of resin on the plant which wouldn't give you a very strong high, but a concentrated amount of resin with a low potency could actually be quite strong . So potency and strength, when used in relation to cannabis can be misleading.

The strength of Cannabis also varies depending on the strain or variety of the plant, the way in which the plant is grown, the part of the plant that is used, and the way the plant is prepared for use and stored.

HEALTH

Mental Health

Current evidence around cannabis and mental health suggests that it may make existing mental health issues worse in some people, particularly if you are smoking high THC Skunk. It may also bring on mental health issues in people who have an underlying condition they may not yet be aware of.

Young People and Mental Health

Teenagers and young adults whose brains are not yet fully grown are particularly at risk. It is thought that cannabis may cause physical changes within the brain which can lead to schizophrenia and psychosis. Higher THC cannabis has been linked to an increased chance of developing these conditions.

Physical Health

Smoking is harmful to the lungs, throat and heart, so mixing it with tobacco, or not, isn't really the issue. Inhaling any burning organic matter releases harmful toxins into your body. Skunk can also contain pesticides and fertilisers which have been used during its production as well as bacteria which can grow on the buds and can compromise the immune system. This can be a problem for those living with HIV/AIDS or cancer. You can get rid of the bacteria by heating your cannabis in an oven at about 66-93 degrees Celcius.



THE FLOWERING BUD OF THE CANNABIS
PLANT. YOU CAN SEE THE CRYSTAL LIKE
RESIN DROPS WHICH CONTAIN THE THC

REDUCING THE RISKS

AVOID TOBACCO

Although cannabis has its own share of tar and toxins there is no point in adding to the negatives by combining it with a damaging and addictive substance like tobacco.

SMOKE UNFILTERED JOINTS

Using a normal cigarette filter will cut out some of the THC, leading you to inhale harder and longer on the joint to get the effect you want. This is going to increase the levels of tar and toxins you inhale. Just use a plain rolled up piece of card with no print on (roach).

ONLY USE GLASS, STAINLES STEEL, OR BRASS BONGS OR PIPES

Bongs made from plastic, wood, rubber or aluminium cans give off toxic fumes when they get hot. Remember, when passing the bong or pipe around that it could contain bacteria or viruses from everybody else that has used it. Probably best to stick to using your own.

TAKE SMALLER PULLS FROM YOUR JOINT

Most of the THC in the joint is absorbed quite easily by your lungs in the first few seconds, so no need to show off by holding the smoke for longer or deeper. This just increases the damage to your lungs.



VAPORISERS

One of the least harmful ways of using cannabis is to use a vaporiser. This is a device which heats up the cannabis enough to release the THC but not enough to produce damaging smoke.

EAT IT

You can add cannabis to food when you are cooking. But remember, the effects of cannabis when eaten take a lot longer to hit you than when you smoke.

The effects can take an hour or two to start and a few hours to reach their peak and may last for up to 12 hours or more. So don't eat a piece of hash cake and then, a few minutes later, eat some more because it hasn't 'started working'. Give it a chance to get going before you neck some more.

Are you happy with your cannabis use?

Most people will have a positive experience when using cannabis, But for some of you, cannabis will become an issue. The list below will help you identify some of the warning signs.

Are you using more cannabis than you used to?

Are you developing a tolerance and need more to achieve the same effect?

Getting Moody?

If you don't smoke your normal amount of cannabis are you irritable, feel a bit moody and have trouble sleeping?

Time and Stress?

Do you spend a lot of time getting hold of cannabis and recovering from its effects? Stressing out when your dealer doesn't answer their phone straight away or doesn't answer their door after the first knock?

Has your Life Changed?

Think about what you used to get up to before you started using cannabis. Do you still do them? If not, then maybe cannabis is taking their place.

Do you want to give up or cut down but can't seem to get your head around it?

If two or three of these apply to you then maybe you should think about cutting down or stopping altogether.

Fed up with being stoned?

You may be getting bored with being stoned, it may be affecting your health, using all your money, getting in the way of relationships. These are all good reasons for wanting to make changes.

There are a number of steps you can take which may help.

1. Think about why you want to change.

- > **Put together a list of good and bad things about your cannabis use.**

You can refer to this during your moments of weakness to remind yourself why you decided to make changes in the first place.

- > **Create a cannabis diary.**

Create a diary of how much you smoked in the last week or two, how much you spent, where you smoked and who with. It will help motivate you and identify high risk situations.

2. Plan ahead

- > **Tell your friends or family what you are about to do.**

It will make it easier to refuse a joint when offered, and your friends and family may be more understanding when you are feeling a bit on edge and being a pain.

- > **Think about high-risk situations**

These are times when you may be tempted to go back to your old ways, this could be meeting your mates somewhere where you would all spark up, a programme you watch or even a piece of music

you would normally listen to while you are stoned. During the first few days it is probably best to avoid these situations.

> **Avoid the friends you normally smoke with for a while.**

It will make it easier if you don't place temptation in your way.

> **Cravings and withdrawal symptoms**

How withdrawal symptoms affect you depend on how much you used to smoke and how long you have been smoking for, but these can include:

- irritability
- urges to smoke (cravings)
- anxiety
- feeling depressed
- feeling angry
- confusion

these symptoms appear in the form of:

- sleep problems
- restlessness
- loss of appetite
- tremors
- sweating (mainly at night)

Symptoms start between one and three days after stopping cannabis and last for around two weeks. They are not going to harm you and are a positive sign that the body is adapting to being cannabis free.

Individual cravings will only last for a few minutes so put off the decision to smoke for say 10 minutes

and go and do something else, maybe go for a walk or read a book or magazine. The urge will pass. Every time you get through a craving without giving in it will get easier.

> **Start to cut down**

It may help some people to cut down the amount of cannabis they use before they stop altogether.

Delay the first smoke of the day, put less cannabis in each joint, or simply have less joints.

3. Getting on with it.

> **Deal with high-risk situations**

Clear your flat of any cannabis paraphernalia, including skins, pipes, bong, etc. Delete your dealers number from your phone.

> **Stay active**

Doing something else will help take up the space in your head that cannabis used to.

> **Do something new**


Start a new hobby or enrol on a course.

> **Look after yourself**

Stick to a healthy diet, try to get as much sleep as you can, drink plenty of water and try to get some exercise, this will help lower your stress levels.

4. Keep going

Depending on how long you have been smoking cannabis, you may not succeed on the first attempt. Don't beat yourself up if this happens, you haven't failed, you have just taken the first step. Try again - it will probably be a bit easier next time.



THE LAW

Cannabis is illegal. It is a class B drug. It's against the law to possess, sell, give away, grow, or let your premises be used for smoking it.

The maximum penalty for possession of a Class B drug can be up to five years in prison and an unlimited fine.

The maximum penalty for supplying a Class B drug can be 14 years' imprisonment a fine or both.

If you are over 18

An 'escalation' penalty system for possession of the drug is used to decide the punishment for anyone caught in possession.

First offence:

Verbal 'cannabis warning' from the police.

Second offence:

Penalty Notice for Disorder (PND), resulting in an on-the-spot £80 fine.

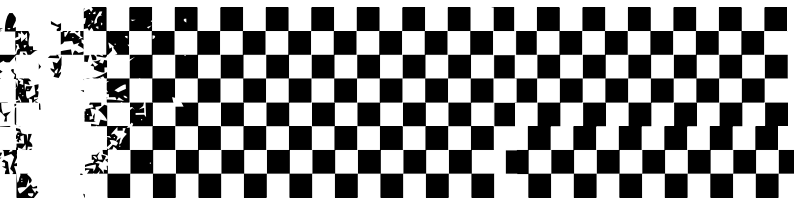
Third offence:

Arrest, conditional caution or prosecution.

If you are under 18

Anyone under 18 years of age found in possession of cannabis will be taken to a police station where they may receive a reprimand, final warning or charge, depending on the seriousness of the offence. This must be administered in the presence of an appropriate adult.

If you are caught with cannabis in Scotland you'll be arrested and reported to the Procurator Fiscal, who will decide if criminal proceedings should be taken or not.



Growing Cannabis

People growing a small number of plants can often be charged with possession, supply and production and if convicted could be looking at a short prison sentence, while commercial growers could face even longer inside.

Indoor growing systems can be detected quite easily from the thermal camera of a police helicopter and the large electricity bills could easily land you in trouble.

Drug Driving

Some people think that cannabis is a 'safer substitute' than drinking alcohol, but it can cause concentration to wander, which can affect reaction times. It can also cause paranoia, drowsiness, distorted perception and a sense of disorientation - all of which could cause you to lose control at the wheel.

Even though the effects of cannabis fade after a matter of hours, it can be detected in your body for up to four weeks. In theory, this can compromise the driver if they're tested positive, even if their driving wasn't adversely affected at the time.

A criminal record can affect your future employment and travel

A criminal record can be a real problem at home, college, work, and in later life.

Even convictions that are supposed to be 'spent' (which means that you do not have to declare it when asked in relation to travel or work) could still show up.

There are also lots of jobs which require an 'enhanced check' such as teacher, taxi driver, soldier etc.

Other countries will have their own laws on drug convictions and these could cause you travel problems.

USEFUL STUFF

KNOW CANNABIS

www.knowcannabis.org.uk

This website can help you assess your cannabis use, its impact on your life and how to make changes if you need to.

FRANK

www.talktofrank.com

Helpline 0800 77 66 00

Call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, FRANK is around to give you FREE info on drugs.

URBAN 75

www.urban75.com

A resource for people who want to access drug information and make their own, informed decisions.

THE SITE

www.thesite.org/drinkanddrugs

The site provides factsheets and articles on all the key issues facing young people, including drugs.

RELEASE

www.release.org.uk

Helpline 0845 4500 215

Release is the national centre of expertise on drugs and drugs law - providing free and confidential specialist advice to the public and professionals.