

# facts

# Cannabis & Psychosis

## **What is Cannabis?**

Cannabis refers to the products of the Cannabis sativa plant, also known as marijuana and hashish (depending on which part of the plant is used). Although illegal in Australia, Cannabis is widely available for use as a recreational drug. It is commonly taken by mixing with tobacco and smoking as a hand rolled joint, or by inhaling through a water cooled pipe called a bong. It may also be cooked in food and eaten.

## **How many people use Cannabis?**

Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug. A recent study indicated that around 30 percent of the total population had tried Cannabis at some time. Among people under 35 years of age, around 50 percent had tried it at some time, and 28 percent had used it in the previous 12 months.

## **How long do the effects last?**

The effects of Cannabis begin within minutes and may last for several hours.

People with a psychotic illness or who have a predisposition to such an illness, may experience more serious and or long term effects.

Psychotic illnesses are characterised by symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations and thought disorders. When people experience psychotic symptoms, they are unable to distinguish what is real - there is a loss of contact with reality.

## **Does Cannabis cause affect the brain?**

Use of drugs like Cannabis may cause a condition known as Drug-Induced Psychosis. This usually passes after a few days; however, if someone has a predisposition to a psychotic illness such as schizophrenia, these drugs may precipitate the first episode in what can be a lifelong, disabling condition.

## **How does Cannabis affect someone who as a psychotic illness?**

Cannabis generally makes psychotic symptoms worse and lowers the chances of recovery from a psychotic episode. People with psychotic illness like schizophrenia, who use drugs experience more hallucinations, delusions and other symptoms. They have a higher rate of hospitalisation for psychosis, and treatment is generally less effective.

## **Should people with a psychotic illness avoid drugs like Cannabis?**

Yes. The consequences can be serious for the person's health that it is best to avoid drugs such as Cannabis completely. It can be helpful to look at other, healthier ways of socialising and relaxing.

## **How do I find out more?**

The Schizophrenia Fellowship of North Queensland produces a range of other fact sheets and information packages. The Fellowship also offers face to face and telephone support.

To find out more, call the Fellowship on (07) 47 253 664.