

# CANNABIS AND MENTAL HEALTH

The link between the use of cannabis and mental health problems is an issue that receives a lot of attention in both research and the media. Although severe illnesses such as schizophrenia have received a large portion of this attention, there is also debate about whether the use of cannabis can lead to more common psychiatric disorders such as depression and anxiety.

## Does smoking cannabis cause schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is an illness that involves psychosis, which refers to a mental syndrome that makes it difficult to tell what is real and what is not. Someone suffering from psychosis might hear voices that are not really there (hallucinations), or believe things that are not true (delusions). Hallucinations and delusions can also be accompanied by muddled thinking and speech, making it difficult for other people to understand what the person is saying.

There have been reports of people experiencing these psychotic symptoms after smoking a lot of cannabis or more cannabis than they are used to. This is rare and the symptoms, although frightening at the time, usually go away if use of cannabis is stopped. Cannabis has been shown to make psychotic symptoms worse in those who already have a psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia.

Some claim that cannabis can cause schizophrenia. Evidence suggests that cannabis may somehow trigger schizophrenia in those who are already at risk of developing the disorder. Those with a vulnerability to develop schizophrenia, such as having a family history of the illness, should be advised against using cannabis for this reason.

## Does smoking cannabis cause depression or anxiety?

The link between cannabis and other more common mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety is confusing, because often cannabis is used to relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Cannabis may work well at easing depression before the effects of the drug wear off; however after that, smoking cannabis may make depression worse. Those who use cannabis have been shown to have higher levels of depression and depressive symptoms than those who do not use cannabis. Although results are mixed, there is a substantial amount of evidence to suggest that cannabis use, particularly frequent or heavy use, predicts depression later in life.

Cannabis can lead to symptoms of anxiety, such as panic, in the short-term, but there is a lack of evidence pointing to cannabis as an important risk factor for chronic anxiety disorders.