Cannabis is a Class B drug. This means that:

- It is illegal to have (possession). It doesn’t matter what a person is using it for, even pain relief, the penalty is up to five years in jail, an unlimited fine or both.
- Police can issue a warning or an on-the-spot fine of £90 if someone is found with cannabis.
- The penalty is likely to be more severe if a person is ‘supplying’ or ‘dealing’ drugs (giving away or selling). Sharing drugs is also considered supplying. If someone is dealing cannabis this has a penalty of up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.
- If someone is under 18, the police are allowed to tell their parent, guardian or carer that they’ve been caught with drugs.
- A person with a drug-related offence may not be allowed to visit certain countries, for example the United States, and this can limit the types of jobs they can apply for.

Source: FRANK 2013 and GOV.UK 2013
CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS CANNABIS?

- Cannabis can affect the way the brain works. Regular, heavy use makes it difficult to learn and concentrate and research has linked cannabis use to poor exam results. This is a potentially serious risk if you’re young, when the brain is still developing. People who take a lot of cannabis can also find they lack motivation.

- A recent review of cannabis research published in the *British Medical Journal* found those driving under the influence of cannabis had nearly double the risk of a crash.

Cannabis can mess with your body

- Tobacco and cannabis share some of the same chemical ‘nasties’, so, like smoking tobacco, smoking cannabis can make asthma worse, can cause wheezing in people without asthma and can even lead to lung cancer.

- When people mix cannabis with tobacco they’re also taking on all the risks associated with smoking tobacco, which can range from coughs and chest infections to cancer or heart disease.

- It can increase the heart rate and affect blood pressure, which can be especially harmful for those with heart disease.

- It is reported that frequent use of cannabis may affect fertility. It can cut a man’s sperm count and can stop ovulation in women.

- If you’re pregnant, smoking cannabis may increase the risk of your baby being born smaller than expected.

What is the effect of mixing cannabis and alcohol?

Mixing cannabis with alcohol can have particularly serious consequences – the accident rate is 16 times higher than for cannabis or alcohol alone.

Impurities

What is cannabis cut with?

Cannabis may be ‘cut’ (mixed) with other substances to increase the weight and the dealer’s profits.

- Impurities in cannabis may include a variety of substances, with laboratory-confirmed reports of glass and pesticides being found in herbal forms of cannabis; and with hash/resin frequently being mixed with a range of substances to increase weight and the dealer’s profits. In April 2010, a study, looking into contaminants in drugs reported that there were cases of cannabis being adulterated with henna, lead and aluminium.

- Any impurities you smoke could be inhaled into the lungs alongside the wide range of chemicals naturally found in cannabis.

- Like tobacco, cannabis has lots of chemical ‘nasties’. So if you smoke it, cannabis could cause lung disease and possibly cancer too, especially when smoked with tobacco.

Getting hooked

Can you get addicted to cannabis?

The simple answer is ‘yes, people do become dependent on cannabis’. This means you can get ‘cravings’ for cannabis, and may have difficulty staying off it even if you recognise using it has started to cause you problems.

And regular users can also get some unpleasant withdrawal symptoms on stopping, including irritability, mood changes, feeling sick, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping; and even sweating, shaking and diarrhoea in some people.

You’re also at real risk of getting addicted to nicotine, or staying addicted to it, if you roll your spliffs with tobacco.

If you feel that you have a problem with your cannabis use and want to stop or cut down, there are treatment services that can help you.
They expected people with schizophrenia who used cannabis to have exaggerated differences in regions linked to both schizophrenia and cannabis use compared with those with a history of cannabis use but not of schizophrenia.

- That people with remote cannabis use disorders would have poorer working memory than ‘clean’ controls.
- That structural differences in brain structure would correlate with working memory and cannabis use disorder history.
- Cross-sectional study can characterise differences between different populations. However, it can’t tell us whether cannabis use caused the differences in brain structure seen.

**What did the research involve?**

In this study, cannabis use disorder was defined as cannabis use resulting in three or more of the following in a 12-month period:

- tolerance
- withdrawal symptoms taking larger amounts of cannabis and for longer periods than intended
- want to cut down or quit but have been unsuccessful spending a lot of time getting cannabis, using it and recovering giving up or reducing important social, occupational or recreational activities using cannabis even though they know the risks.

Or one or more of the following:

- recurrent use resulting in failure to fulfil a major obligation at work, home or school
- recurrent use in physically hazardous situations
- recurrent legal problems as a result of cannabis use
- continued use despite persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused by cannabis use.

The researchers imaged the brains of:

- 44 healthy ‘clean’ people (without a history of cannabis use)
- Ten people with a remote cannabis use disorder (history of cannabis dependence, but not over the past six months)
- 28 ‘clean’ people with schizophrenia
- 15 people with schizophrenia and a remote cannabis use disorder.

Participants were matched on age, gender, hand dominance and parental socioeconomic status. They also performed a series of tests to assess working memory.

**What were the basic results?**

The researchers looked at a region of the brain called the subcortex. They found that there were significant differences between healthy ‘clean’ people and people with a remote cannabis use disorder in the surface shape of parts of the subcortex. Likewise, there were