

# Synthetic cannabis facts

## What is synthetic cannabis?

Synthetic cannabis is a new psychoactive substance that is designed to mimic or produce similar effects to cannabis. It has been sold online since 2004.

Synthetic cannabis is produced with man-made chemicals that create similar effects to delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the active ingredient in cannabis. However, reports suggest it also produces additional negative effects. These liquid chemicals are added to herbs and sold in colourful, branded packets. The chemicals usually vary from batch to batch as manufacturers try to stay ahead of the law, so different packets can produce different effects even if the name and branding on the package looks the same.

### Other names

Synthetic cannabis is marketed under different brand names.

Spice was the earliest in a series of synthetic cannabis products sold in many European countries. Since then a number of similar products have been developed, such as Kronic, Northern Lights, Mojo, Lightning Gold, Lightning Red and Godfather.

Synthetic cannabis is also marketed as aphrodisiac tea, herbal incense and potpourri.

### How is it used?

It's most commonly smoked and sometimes drunk as a tea.

## Effects of synthetic cannabis

**There is no safe level of drug use.** Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Synthetic cannabis affects everyone differently, based on:

- Size, weight and health
- Whether the person is used to taking it
- Whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- The amount taken
- The chemical used and its strength (varies from batch to batch)

Synthetic cannabis is relatively new, so there is limited information available about its short and long-term effects. However, it has been reported to have similar effects to cannabis along with some additional negative and potentially more harmful ones including:

- Fast and irregular heartbeat
- Racing thoughts
- Agitation and paranoia
- Psychosis
- Aggressive and violent behaviour

*Reports suggest that synthetic cannabis is more harmful than cannabis, with an increased possibility of it causing psychotic symptoms and possibly seizures.*

- Chest pain
- Vomiting
- Acute kidney injury
- Seizures
- Stroke<sup>1,2,3,5</sup>

Use of synthetic cannabis is likely to be more dangerous when:

- Taken in combination with alcohol or other drugs
- Driving or operating heavy machinery
- Judgment or motor coordination is required
- Alone (in case medical assistance is required)
- The person has a mental health problem
- The person has a cardiac problem

### Long-term effects

There has been limited research into synthetic cannabis dependence. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that long-term, regular use can cause tolerance and dependence.<sup>2</sup>

### Withdrawal

Giving up synthetic cannabis after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it.

It has been reported that some people who use synthetic cannabis heavily on a regular basis may experience withdrawal symptoms when they try to stop including:

- Insomnia
- Paranoia
- Panic attacks
- Rapid heartbeat<sup>1,2</sup>

#### Further information

The DrugInfo website has information on:

- Help & support services
- Treatment
- Laws relating to new psychoactive substance

Go to [druginfo.adf.org.au](http://druginfo.adf.org.au)

# Factsheet

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