



Coping Using Cannabis

What is “coping?”

When faced with difficult situations, stress or tragedy, people use different strategies to help manage their well-being and avoid feeling overwhelmed. These strategies are also known as ‘coping.’



Using cannabis to cope can lead to regular use, which may have **adverse effects on teenage brain development & mental health**. Cannabis research is ongoing; here’s what we know based on existing evidence.

Youth need stress relief

- **34%** of young Canadians (11-15) experience **weekly symptoms of mental distress**.¹
- **42%** of Canadian teens (13-17) report being **stressed**.²
- **23%** of Canadian young adults (18-34) say most days are “quite a bit” or “extremely” **stressful**.³

Cannabis is a common coping tool

Studies show it’s common for youth to use cannabis to deal with stress, especially for those who use cannabis regularly.^{4,5}

Youth say cannabis helps them cope with stress by:⁶



Helping with sleep



Increasing appetite
(if having trouble eating due to stress, depression)



Disconnecting from reality



Distracting from worries

Chronic use may have long-term effects

If a young person is using cannabis to cope, it’s possible they will use it on a regular basis. Frequent, consistent use in adolescence has been connected to differences in brain development and mental health issues.⁷

- 27% of youth who use cannabis do so **daily or almost daily**.⁸
- Brain imaging of teenage cannabis users vs. non-users revealed differences in the **size, connectivity, and quality** of various brain structures.⁹
- Some research has found connections between regular cannabis use and **mental health issues** including psychosis, depression, and anxiety, particularly individuals with a personal or family history of these conditions.¹⁰
- Cannabis use during adolescence (especially heavy use) has also been linked to increased risk of **cannabis use disorder**.¹¹ Approximately 16% of cannabis users that start during adolescence will meet criteria for a CUD, versus 9% of people that begin use during adulthood.¹²

A Safer Zen

There are healthy and effective ways to cope with stress.



Physical exercise releases endorphins; chemicals that work in the brain to reduce pain perception and trigger positive feelings.



Yoga, meditation, and deep breathing have been shown to improve stress, anxiety, mood disorders, and depression, by increasing positive brain activity and reducing cortisol (the “stress hormone”).¹³



Journaling or verbalizing our thoughts helps relieve stress by reducing activity in the amygdala (the brain’s “alarm system”), making us less reactive and more mindful.¹⁴



Seek support from trusted friends, parents, teachers or care providers. Speaking about stress allows new ideas to be shared and explored about how to overcome a difficult situation.

Reference List

- ¹ Unicef Canada (2019), [Where Does Canada Stand? Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being](#)
- ² Kids Help Phone (2015), [Teens Talk: A Report on Youth Issues](#)
- ³ Statistics Canada (2018-19), [Perceived life stress, by age group](#)
- ⁴ Glodosky & Cutler (2020), [Motives Matter-Cannabis use motives moderate associations between stress & negative affect](#)
- ^{5,6} CCSA (2017), [Canadian Youth Perceptions on Cannabis](#)
- ⁷⁻¹⁰ CCSA (2015), [The Effects of Cannabis Use during Adolescence](#)
- ¹¹ Silins et al. (2014) Young adult sequelae of adolescent cannabis use
- ¹² CCSA (2020). [Cannabis \(Canadian Drug Summary\)](#)
- ¹³ [What are the health benefits of yoga?](#) (September 23, 2019)
- ¹⁴ [Why Talking About Our Problems Makes Us Feel Better](#) (June 11, 2019)