

# What are common risks shared by cannabis and alcohol?



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Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in cannabis alters the way a person thinks, acts and feels. It can cause reduced focus and slower reaction time. It can also alter depth perception, making it more difficult to judge distance, drive straight or use the brakes.<sup>1</sup>

## Impaired Driving

Alcohol can cause reduced coordination, divided attention, slower reaction time, and a reduced ability to maintain consistent speed.<sup>1</sup>

Cannabis smoke can cause dry cough, bronchitis, emphysema and reduced immune function.<sup>3</sup> THC in cannabis can also increase the risk of stroke or heart attack, and use during before age 25 can impair brain development.<sup>4</sup>

## Physical risks

Alcohol use can increase the risk of various cancers (liver, throat, breast and stomach). Alcohol use can also cause increased blood pressure and cirrhosis of the liver, as well as sexual impotence.<sup>5</sup>

Cannabis use alone is reported in 22% of all substance related hospitalizations of Canadians ages 10 to 24. Reasons for hospital stays include Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS), psychotic episodes, cannabis poisoning, impaired driving-related injuries and mental health disorders.<sup>6</sup>

## Hospital Visits

Alcohol use is reported in 26% of all substance related hospitalizations of youth ages 10 to 24 in Canada. Reasons for hospitalization include impaired driving-related injuries, alcohol poisoning, cirrhosis of the liver and seizures.<sup>6</sup>

THC in cannabis can cause panic attacks, paranoia and delusions. Continued THC use is associated with anxiety, depression and psychotic disorders, especially for those with a family history of these conditions.<sup>7</sup>

## Mental Health Risks

Anxiety disorders and depression are linked to alcohol dependence.<sup>8</sup> Long-term alcohol use also increases the risk of developing dementia.<sup>13</sup>

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Using cannabis during pregnancy may cause low birth weight, premature birth and stillbirth. THC can also be passed through breast milk, which can impair a child's verbal and emotional skill development.<sup>9</sup>

## Pregnancy

Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. FASD is a lifelong condition that affects motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, emotional regulation and social skills.<sup>10</sup>

People affected with disordered cannabis use that try to quit using may experience anxiety attacks, depression, headaches, restlessness, decreased appetite, nausea, shakiness, tremors, fatigue and insomnia.<sup>11</sup>

## Withdrawal From Use

Risks of withdrawal from alcohol can include excessive sweating, fatigue, stress, anxiety, nausea, vomiting and rapid heart rate. Quitting after years of heavy use can cause hallucinations, seizures and delirium tremens, which can be fatal if not treated medically.<sup>12</sup>

## If you choose to use cannabis or alcohol...



Avoid mixing substances



Designate a driver



Avoid both if you are pregnant



Seek medical attention if needed

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