

What cannabis does in the body

The active ingredients. Cannabis contains many cannabinoids; the best known are THC and CBD. THC gets you high, CBD does not. In the fresh plant, THC is mostly present as THCA; it only becomes THC when heated. Marijuana is the dried flowers, hashish is the pressed resin. How much THC they contain varies widely.

How THC works. The body has its own cannabinoid system. THC docks onto its receptors; the CB1 receptors are found mainly in the brain. In the reward system, THC indirectly releases more dopamine. That explains the high and also why cannabis can be addictive. Among other things, THC affects memory and emotions, coordination and sense of time, and heart rate and digestion.

What the effect depends on. THC content, amount, form of use, state of mind and surroundings. Many people experience relaxation and a lifted mood. Restlessness, anxiety, panic and distorted perception are just as possible, especially with a lot of THC or when someone is not in a good state.

How long it lasts. Smoked or vaporised, the effect starts almost immediately, peaks after about a quarter of an hour and has largely worn off after two to three hours. Eaten or drunk, it comes on with a delay, often suddenly, and is hard to predict.

In the body. Dry mouth, red eyes, a faster heartbeat, dizziness and the munchies are common. Concentration, memory and reaction time decline during the high. That increases the risk of accidents on the road and at work.

How long cannabis can be detected. Breakdown products in urine: about three days after a single use, ten to 15 days with daily use, and over 30 days with heavy long-term use. The figures vary widely.

Key points

- Eaten: do not take more just because you cannot feel anything yet.
- Do not drive or operate machinery while it is working.
- The effect wears off after hours, the traces do not.

Sources: drugcom.de (BIÖG), drug encyclopaedia, entry on cannabis; NIDA, Cannabis and the Brain; Moeller, Lee, Kissack (2008), Urine Drug Screening, Mayo Clinic Proceedings 83(1).

More detail: csc.do/en/prevention/knowledge/what-cannabis-does-in-the-body/ · Cannabis Social Club Dortmund e.V. · As of 28 September 2026 · May be passed on unchanged (CC BY-ND 4.0)



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