

What are synthetic cannabinoids?

- Drugs created in illegal labs with chemicals that are not naturally occurring.
- Sprayed onto herbs/plant matter to create cannabis-like appearance, then smoked.
- Promoted as having similar effects to THC (the ingredient in natural cannabis that creates a 'high'), but shares no actual similarities.
- Causes a number of physical and mental side effects not seen with cannabis and is much more potent.
- Marketed in small packets under different brand names – Spice, Kronic, Northern Lights, K2, Kaos.



Synthetic cannabinoids can cause serious side effects



Heart

- chest pain
- fast and irregular heartbeat
- hypertension (raised blood pressure)



Lungs

- breathing difficulties



Kidneys

- acute kidney injury



Brain

- seizures
- stroke



Psychological

- agitation, anxiety and paranoia
- aggressive and violent behaviour
- psychosis



Other

- severe hyperthermia
- breakdown of muscle tissue (rhabdomyolysis)
- vomiting



Long term

- psychiatric conditions
- serious heart issues
- behavioural and cognitive impairments.



Synthetic cannabinoids are **not a substitute for cannabis**

These drugs are **incorrectly** referred to as synthetic cannabis or synthetic marijuana.

These drugs are **not** a synthetic form of cannabis.

The THC in cannabis is only a partial agonist of CB1 brain receptors, whereas synthetic cannabinoids is a full agonist of these receptors.

This means synthetic cannabinoids impact the brain at a much higher concentration, making them:

- more potent and unpredictable
- more capable of severe physical and mental side effects.
- more similar to stimulant drugs like ice or cocaine in terms of toxicity profile and effects

Drug toxicity has been a direct cause of death in many synthetic cannabinoid-related fatalities.



People with **mental health conditions** or a family history of these conditions should avoid synthetic cannabinoids

- There is a higher risk of symptoms of anxiety or depression.
- Can cause psychotic episodes in both healthy and vulnerable people.
- Compared to cannabis, psychotic symptoms can be more severe and last for weeks following last use.



People with **pre-existing heart conditions** should avoid synthetic cannabinoids

- Can lead to serious heart issues for adults and young people.
- Older people or people with certain heart conditions are particularly at risk.

No level of synthetic cannabinoid use is safe.

Measures can be taken to reduce harm:

- only ever use a small amount – low doses can help determine drug strength
- don't rely on packaging info – ingredients always change and can be misleading
- only take in known environment with people you trust - may help with unpleasant effects
- don't use with alcohol/other drugs, particularly stimulants like ice or cocaine
- never use without a mixer ingredient (e.g.: dried parsley)
- don't inhale with bongs or pipes
- call 000 immediately if bad reaction - ambulance officers do not need to involve police
- keep supply packet and provide to medical professionals if there is a bad reaction.



Help and support

National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline: 1800 250 015
24-hour phoneline providing telephone counselling, information, support and referral.

Path2Help: adf.org.au/path2help

Confidential online tool to help you find support and information tailored to the specific needs of anyone who uses alcohol and other drugs.

Read the Alcohol and Drug Foundation's
Synthetic Cannabinoids Mini Bulletin for further info:

adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/synthetic-cannabinoids