

# adolescent risks

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If you use cannabis early in life (before the age of 16 years), especially if you use a lot or for a long time, you are at a much higher risk of developing serious problems as a result.

## how many young people use cannabis?

Cannabis is the illicit drug most likely to be used by young people. Even so, of people aged 14-19 years, only 20% have ever used cannabis. Even fewer of them (12.9%) have used it in the last 12 months. While the proportion of students using cannabis has decreased in recent years, use is not uncommon among secondary school students, especially amongst older males. While boys in that age group were more likely to have used cannabis than girls in the past, the rates of use are now the same.

## what are the concerns about young people using cannabis?

Adolescence is a time when many important changes take place in your development. Your intellectual abilities increase and your relationships with friends become more and more important. Using cannabis during this time has been linked to a range of developmental and social problems.

## starting cannabis use early on can have a bad effect on your:

- memory, attention and learning
- school performance, attendance and level of qualifications attained
- relationships and behaviour

## using cannabis at an early age is also linked to higher risk-taking behaviour such as:

- higher levels of leaving home
- becoming sexually active too early, which can result in unplanned pregnancy
- getting in trouble with the law, e.g. stealing cars and breaking into houses to pay for drugs

## using cannabis while young can put you at a higher risk of:

- many mental health problems such as psychosis, depression or anxiety
- problems with your emotional development
- becoming more dissatisfied with your life



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## other concerns about early use of cannabis by young people:

- cannabis is illegal in Australia, as it is in most countries in the world. It is an offence to cultivate, possess, use, sell or supply cannabis. Doing so could result in a caution, a criminal record or even a prison sentence, depending on the type of offence and which state it was committed in
- regular and long-term cannabis use can lead to dependence, especially for young people
- using cannabis has been linked to low motivation, i.e. not wanting to get out there and do things, which can have a bad effect on your school, work, family, friends and life in general
- the cost of using cannabis can lead to money problems