Cannabis Use-What Albertans Need to Know

Cannabis is a psychoactive drug derived from the cannabis sativa plant that was legalized for adults 18 years or over in October 2018.

Cannabis has two major chemical components -- tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) & cannabidiol (CBD). THC, the major psychoactive chemical in cannabis, can increase the risk of depression, anxiety, & psychosis. CBD does not have mind-altering effects, & has been used to treat pain, seizures, nausea, & muscle spasms.

Effects of Cannabis Use

Different people have different experiences with cannabis use. Some may feel relaxed, talkative, and euphoric, while others may feel confused or anxious after use.

There are some physical effects of cannabis too. These include redness in the eyes, increase in heart rate, dry mouth, loss of balance and decrease in blood pressure.

The therapeutic uses of cannabis help regulate nausea in chemotherapy patients, appetite, pain and depressed mood and insomnia.

Is Cannabis Addictive?

Yes! Though it is less addictive than nicotine or alcohol, with heavy use, individuals still may experience withdrawal, increased tolerance, & dependence. Those who develop psychological dependent may feel anxious if they can't get it.

If used regularly for a long period of time, individuals could develop physical dependence, which causes mild withdrawal symptoms if they stop using it. These symptoms can include anxiety, upset stomach, sweating, loss of appetite and disturbed sleep.

Who is Vulnerable?

Individuals who are more vulnerable to cannabis use include pregnant women, those under 25, impulsive individuals, those with psychiatric disorders, those with cardiovascular problems, males (more likely to become dependent), & those with a history of psychosis. Heavy cannabis use in individuals under 25 has been linked to negative life outcomes & decreased cognitive functioning.

Treatments that Work

Psychotherapy –

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) helps individuals identify & correct problematic behaviours by applying a range of different skills that can be used to stop excessive cannabis use.

Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) evokes motivated change while addressing any hesitation toward treatment & recovery.

Contingency Management includes giving the patient rewards to reinforce their positive behaviours.

Resources – Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use: A guide, WHO
10 ways to reduce risks to your health when using Cannabis, CAMH
References – Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Cannabis

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