

# 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](https://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](https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/synthetic-cannabinoids)