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It's Possible to Get Addicted to Pot. Here's What to Know.

— The signs, the risks, and the treatment for cannabis use disorder

by Associated Press

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(AP Photo/Hans Pennink, File)

Smita Das, MD, PhD, MPH, often hears the same myth: You can't get [hooked on pot](#).

And the misconception has become more widespread as a growing number of states [legalize marijuana](#). Around half now allow [recreational use](#) for adults and 40 states allow medical use.

But "cannabis is definitely something that someone can develop an addiction to," said Das, an addiction psychiatrist at Stanford University.

It's called cannabis use disorder and it's on the rise, affecting about 3 in 10 people who use pot, according to the CDC.

Here's how to know whether you or a loved one are addicted to marijuana -- and what kinds of treatment exist.

How to Identify Signs of Cannabis Use Disorder

If pot interferes with your daily life, health, or relationships, those are red flags.

"The more that somebody uses and the higher potency that somebody uses, the higher the risk of that," Das said.

It's become more common as cannabis has gotten stronger in recent years. In the 1960s, most pot that people smoked contained less than 5% THC, the ingredient that gets you high. Today, the [THC potency](#) in cannabis flower and concentrates in dispensaries can reach 40% or more, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Cannabis use disorder is diagnosed the same way as any other substance use disorder -- by looking at whether someone meets certain criteria laid out in the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the main guide for mental health providers.

These include needing more of the drug to get the same effect, having withdrawal symptoms, and spending a lot of time trying to get or use it.

"When we break it down into these criteria that have to do with the impacts of their use, it's a lot more relatable," Das said.

What the Different Levels of Addiction Are

If you've met just two of the criteria for cannabis use disorder in the last year, doctors say you have a mild form of the condition. If you meet six or more, you have a more severe form.

According to the latest version of the [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), 7% of all people 12 or older had cannabis use disorder in 2024 and most had a mild form. About 1 in 5 had a severe form.

People can be dependent on and addicted to substances. Dependence is physical, while addiction involves behavior changes.

Marijuana doesn't affect everyone the same way, though. The same amount can have "major impacts" on one person's daily life but have no impact on another person's, Das said. "It really comes down to: How much is that substance impacting someone's functioning and life day-to-day?"

Where People Can Get Help for Cannabis Use Disorder

Many marijuana users first come to Das for help coping with something else, like alcohol use disorder. Later, she said, they'll often come back and mention a struggle with cannabis.

She assures them that there are effective treatments for the disorder.

One is called motivational interviewing, a goal-oriented counseling style that helps people find internal motivation to change their behavior. Another is cognitive behavioral therapy or CBT, a form of talk therapy that helps people to challenge negative thought patterns and reduce unhelpful behaviors.

Twelve-step programs like Marijuana Anonymous can also be helpful, Das said. But whether someone chooses to join a group or not, even being able to lean on a community of people who aren't using pot is an important part for recovery.

Dave Bushnell, a retired digital executive creative director, started a Reddit group 14 years ago for people who, like him, had developed an addiction or dependency to cannabis and wanted help recovering. Its discussion forum has 350,000 members and continues to grow.

Bushnell, 60, said peer support is essential to recovery and some people feel more comfortable chatting online than in person. "This is potheads taking care of potheads," he said.

Doctors urged people who need help to get it, whether it's with a professional or in a peer group.

As with alcohol, "just because something's legal doesn't mean that it's safe," Das said.
