



Cannabis Edibles Fact Sheet

This resource provides an update on cannabis edible products and includes harm reduction information for people who choose to use.

Cannabis can be categorised as both a depressant and psychedelic type substance. It can have different effects for different people based on a number of personal factors and how much is taken at a given time.

The cannabis plant is considered complex as it contains hundreds of compounds called ‘Cannabinoids’. The main psychoactive compound in cannabis is called THC (delta9 tetrahydrocannabinol). Another well-known compound is CBD.

Cannabis has complex effects, many of which are categorised as ‘depressant’. However, it stimulates the heart, increasing both blood pressure and pulse.

Cannabis comes in the form of leaf, buds (“weed”), resin (“hash”) and oil. The market and variety of cannabis based products continues to expand. It is usually consumed by smoking or vaping but can also be eaten or drank known as ‘edibles’.

Cannabis edible products

Cannabis ‘edibles’ are food products infused with cannabis. Edibles come in many forms—including baked goods, sweets, jellies, ‘gummy bears’, chocolates and lozenges. We are also aware of cannabis drinks available on the Irish market known as ‘THC lean’.

Food products containing cannabis have been available internationally in locations such as the Netherlands as cakes sold in coffee shops. More recently, food products containing cannabis have emerged as products sold as part of the legalised market in Northern America, but these products are not legalised in an Irish context. Many of these new products replicate well known commercial food brands.

Effects and risks associated with cannabis edible products

It is important to note that each person can have a different response to cannabis edibles. Everyone’s response to all substances, including cannabis differs and it can vary from one time to the next based on the contents, how people are feeling and where they are using.

The effects a person experiences will be based on:

- **Their existing mind-set:** How they are feeling, their mental health status and if they have underlying concerns
- **The setting they are in** and why they are using

- **Personal factors:** Gender, weight, metabolism and if they have eaten in advance
- **Tolerance to cannabis:** If they regularly use cannabis
- **How much is consumed** and if the product contains unknown compounds

Why do people use edibles?

People may choose to use if they want to avoid smoking.

Some sought after effects include:

- **Relaxation**
- **Happiness, laughter, euphoria, to feel 'high'**
- **For fun or enjoyment to socialise with friends**
- **Self-medication**

Some people may not react as expected. This can lead to unwanted effects such as:

- **Feeling too high**
- **Anxiety or panic**
- **Paranoia or negative thoughts**
- **Hallucinations**
- **Increased heart rate palpitations**

Be in the know on emerging trends and risks

- **THC doses vary:** The amount of THC contained in edible products can vary across a single product and across batches made at different times, making it difficult for a person to estimate how much THC they consume and how they will react.
- **Limited data in Ireland:** Any products seized in Ireland have not been subject to quantitative analysis, meaning we are unsure of the amount of THC contained in products and if the packaging correctly shows the dose/strength.
- **You can't trust the contents:** There is evidence to suggest that products are being made in counterfeit labs so people cannot trust the contents of all products available on the Irish market.
- **The emergence of synthetic cannabinoids:** Substances known as 'synthetic cannabinoids' have been found in cannabis edible products in Ireland and Sweden. These substances are extremely risky and increase the risk of poisoning or death.
- **Accidental exposure:** Evidence from Canada and USA shows there is a risk of accidental exposure among children, especially where products are designed branded to look like sweets.
- **Unexpected effects:** For some people, the effects of edible cannabis can be more mentally intense compared to inhaling a similar dose of dried cannabis.

Why consuming edibles is different to smoking cannabis

- **Avoidance of smoking:** The big advantage of eating cannabis over smoking is that you avoid inhaling smoke into your lungs. Cannabis smoke contains many of the same toxins and carcinogens as tobacco smoke. Over the long term, smoking any substance can cause some damage to the lungs. By eating cannabis, this risk is avoided.
- **Delayed effects:** The most prominent difference between ingestion and inhalation of cannabis extracts is the delayed onset of drug effect. A person will not feel the effects immediately like smoking cannabis. In some cases it could take over two hours before the peak effects are felt. It is harder for a person to know an accurate dose or gauge how they will react compared to inhaling.
- **Harder to predict the effects /easier to take too much:** People may easily consume too much THC without knowing until the effects are felt some time later. This can increase the risks of adverse mental health reactions such as prolonged hallucinations, anxiety or behaviour changes.
- **Compounds are altered in the stomach, intestine and liver:** The body processes edible products in a different way which leads to more intense effects.

The effects of smoking and ingesting cannabis

INHALING

(smoking or vaping)



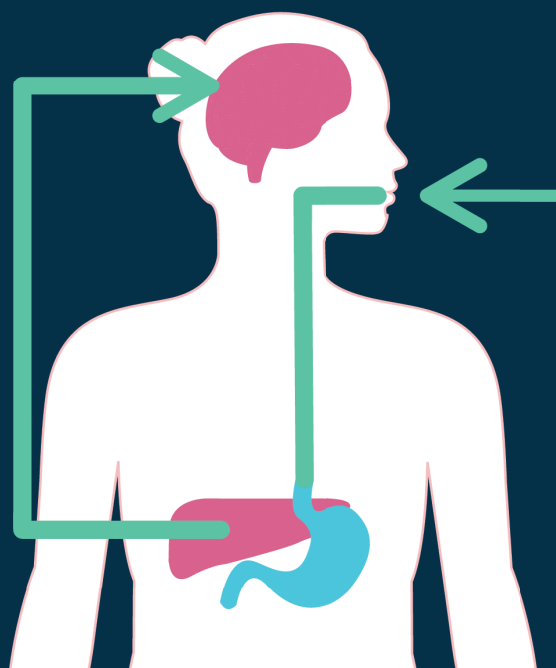
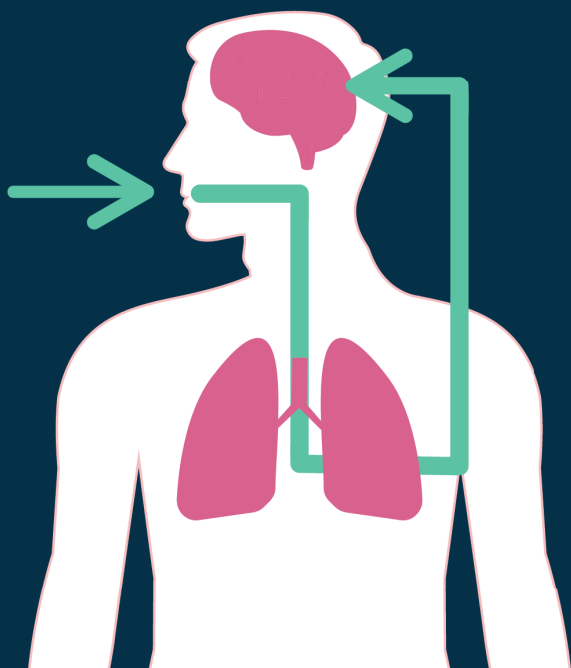
Cannabis smoke or vapour delivers THC into the lungs where it passes directly into the bloodstream and brain.

INGESTING

(eating or drinking)



When eaten, cannabis first travels to the stomach and then to the liver before the bloodstream and the brain. Eating can cause more potent effects compared to smoking due to how the liver processes edibles.



Start of effects

You will feel the effects from **seconds to a few minutes** of inhaling.



Effects of ingestion

The effects will be felt anything from **30 minutes to 2 hours** after ingesting. This can vary from person to person.

Peak effects

Full effects can peak within **30 minutes**.



Peak effects

Full effects can peak within **4 hours**.

Length of effects

The length of effects vary from person and can last up to **4 hours** or longer for some people.



Length of effects

Effects can last up to **12 hours** after use.

Onset of effects: eating vs smoking compared

	Eating	Smoke/Vape
Time of onset (when you start to feel the effects)	30 - 90 minutes	3 - 5 minutes
Time to peak effect (when you feel most of the effects)	2 - 3 hours	15 - 30 minutes
Duration of effect (how long you feel the effects)	4 - 12 hours	2 - 4 hours
Ease of titration (Dosing to see how your body is reacting, to limit the unwanted effects)	Difficult	Relatively easy
Predictability of effect (Knowing how you will react)	Poor	Good

Global Drug Survey 2019

Reduce the harms if you choose to use cannabis edibles

It is always safer not to use cannabis edible products at all. If you do, see below information.

- **Avoid use if you are under the age of 18:** Using cannabis while your brain is still developing can increase the risk of you developing long term issues.
- **Think about the 'set' and 'setting':** Think about how you're feeling in regards to your mental health and where you are using. Eat well in advance; be with people you trust and in a safe environment.
- **Avoid using if you are feeling low, anxious, depressed, have mental health concerns or a family history of mental health conditions.**
- **Think about your tolerance to cannabis** and how much you plan to take, especially if you don't regularly use cannabis.
- **Think about the contents:** Keep in mind that the edible market is rapidly changing and you can't be sure of the contents. There is a new risk of synthetic cannabinoids emerging. If you don't trust the packaging of a product, consider not taking it and binning the product.
- **You can't be sure of the dose labelled on the products:** You may not know the strain of cannabis in the product or how it was prepared.
- **Start low and go slow:** it could be easy to take too much without knowing. Don't immediately consume the full product.
- **Avoid taking more 're-dosing':** the effects can take some time to kick in, over 2 hours in some cases. Wait until you feel the effects to gauge how you are feeling
- **Don't use with other substances:** Mixing drugs can be unpredictable and increase the chance of unwanted effects or becoming unwell.
- **If you don't react as expected:** You should consider not taking any more.
- **Consider the duration of effects before use:** The effects can last much longer than smoking, in some cases up to 12 hours.
- **Don't drive after consuming edible products:** Be mindful that the effects can last up to 12 hours after consuming and may be detected in your system for some time after.
- **Store products safely to avoid unintentional consumption by children or pets.**
- **Don't be afraid to get medical help** if you or a friend become unwell or feel suicidal after using. You can also contact the National Poisons Centre (available 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday on **01 8092166**) for advice if someone is having a bad reaction.

Take care with edibles

Although taking too much may not be fatal, it can cause paranoia, anxiety, vomiting, nausea, delusions or hallucinations which can be unpleasant, frightening or lead to accidental injury. In some cases, people could require hospitalisation.

As a rough guide 2.5-5mg THC is considered as a low dose with 25mg and over considered a higher and risky dose of edibles.

While some edible cannabis products are designed to look like ordinary sweets, remember they should not be eaten like sweets and don't be tempted to take more. Even in legal settings, where there is some control over product quality and content, a single jelly may contain a full adult dose of THC. If you plan to use edibles, first check the estimated THC content.

It is easier to over consume when eating or drinking cannabis compared to inhaling cannabis (smoking or vaping). Overconsumption can be termed medically as cannabis 'overdose' or 'poisoning' meaning that you have taken more than your body can handle (Government of Canada, 2021).

Signs and symptoms of overconsumption can include:

- **Chest pain**
- **Rapid heartbeat**
- **Nausea/vomiting**
- **Slowed down breathing**
- **Severe anxiety and/or panic attack**
- **Mental health effects or psychotic episode**

Synthetic cannabinoids exposure

We are currently concerned about the contents of edible products available in Ireland. While products come in branded packaging, we are aware that some are made in clandestine labs. This means that you can't trust the contents.

Extra risky substances known as 'synthetic cannabinoids' have been found in edible, herbal and vape products in Ireland. Synthetic cannabinoids are a growing family of man-made chemicals and should not be confused with cannabis. They are known to be highly potent and can cause poisoning or death.

People may be exposed to synthetic cannabinoids without knowing.

Signs of concern to look out for include:

- **Intense and strong effects**
- **Feeling dizzy, confusion**
- **Abnormal sweating, respiratory issues (difficulty breathing), chest pain/rapid heartbeat**
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Agitation, aggression, psychotic behaviour, hallucinations, delusions, seizures or fits**
- **They can also lead to sudden loss of consciousness and death**

If you think that you or a friend have consumed a synthetic cannabinoid, it is important not be afraid to get medical help by calling **112/999**.



For information and drug harm reduction go to **Drugs.ie**

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's substance use, contact the **HSE Drug and Alcohol Helpline** at **1800 459 459** Monday – Friday 9:30 am – 5:30 pm or email helpline@hse.ie



DRUGS.ie
Drug and Alcohol Information and Support