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YZUP– Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Young Person's Drug and Alcohol Service  
01872 300 816

# Synthetic cannabinoids (spice) information sheet & harm reduction advice

*Pages 1–4 of this sheet can be used with all young people.*

*If you are working with a young person who is likely to continue using synthetic cannabinoids, issue the harm reduction advice from page 5 onwards. Referral to YZUP is strongly advised. We recognise that some ways of using drugs carry less risk than others, and by providing information which supports people to make informed decisions, we can help people to minimise harm.*

## Let's talk about synthetic cannabinoids

Synthetic cannabinoids are man-made substances which are designed to act like the main psychoactive chemical in cannabis.

Common types of synthetic cannabinoids include 'Spice', 'Mamba', 'Amsterdam Gold', 'Annihilation', 'Devil's weed', 'K2', 'Tai' and 'Haze'.

It's becoming increasingly common for these drugs to be found in vapes, as well as edibles (e.g. gummies) and mixed with herbal cannabis.

If someone you're with needs help after taking synthetic cannabinoids, put them in the recovery position and get help fast by calling 999, and telling emergency services everything you know.

If you're concerned about your synthetic cannabinoid use, or if you're worried about someone you know, YZUP is here to support you. We offer free and confidential support. Call us on 01872 300 816 or use our [web chat](#).



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### What do synthetic cannabinoids look like?

In their pure form, synthetic cannabinoids are either solids or oils. These are often turned into a mixture that looks like 'herbal cannabis'.

### How are synthetic cannabinoids taken?

Synthetic cannabinoids are normally used in a similar way to cannabis:

- **Smoking** in a 'joint' or 'spliff' (similar to a self-rolled cigarette), a pipe, or a 'bong', which is where smoke is bubbled through water and inhaled
- **Vaping** through an e-cigarette or vape, where cannabis (or its active **ingredient** THC) is added to the vape liquid
- **Dabbing**, where cannabis oil or 'shatter' is heated to a high temperature and the vapour is inhaled
- **Eating**, through adding it to foods such as cakes, teas, and gummies/lollipops.

### How long do the effects last?

It depends on several factors, including your age, weight and metabolism, what you have already taken, the purity of the drug, and the dose.

Generally speaking, the effects of smoked, vaped or inhaled products usually occur after a few minutes and usually last for around an hour. The effects of eating cannabis products usually take longer to occur.

### How do synthetic cannabinoids make me feel?

Synthetic cannabinoids affect different people in different ways, and how you're feeling can impact the effect you get.

Generally speaking, synthetic cannabinoids can:

- Cause nausea or vomiting ('throwing a whitey')
- Make you feel hungry ('the munchies'),
- Make you feel giggly



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- Make you feel unmotivated, sleepy or withdrawn
- Lead to sexual arousal
- Cause your eyes become red or irritated
- Make your mouth very dry
- Increase your heart rate and cause changes in your blood pressure and blood sugar levels

As synthetic cannabinoids are designed to act like cannabis, the effects are intended to be similar but can be much more intense. Because of their potency, synthetic cannabinoids are more likely to be associated with hallucinations and overdose than natural cannabis. Some people may experience a bad reaction, which could include paranoia, panic attacks, forgetfulness, becoming overly sedated or not responsive.

### **What happens to my body if I use synthetic cannabinoids frequently?**

Synthetic cannabinoids are more potent than natural cannabis. This means it's easier to use too much and experience unpleasant and harmful effects. These include:

- Paranoia and hallucinations
- Anxiety
- Seizures (which may lead to a coma)
- Overheating
- Loss of appetite,
- Acting aggressively or violently
- Inability to speak or move normally
- Extreme drowsiness
- Stomach pain
- Feeling sick
- Severe headaches

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### **What do I do if I think someone has overdosed on synthetic cannabinoids?**

If someone passes out or falls asleep and you can't wake them up, put them in the recovery position and get help fast by calling 999, telling emergency services what you know.

Signs of synthetic cannabinoids overdose include:

1. Anxiety
2. Loss of coordination
3. Panic
4. Uncontrolled muscle movements
5. Increased heart rate
6. Low blood pressure
7. Vomiting
8. Respiratory depression
9. Delirium
10. Suicidal ideation.
11. Psychotic symptoms

If you suspect someone has overdosed, it's always best to administer naloxone. Naloxone reverses the effects of opioid drugs like heroin, morphine and fentanyl. Drugs bought illicitly can contain a mixture of substances, including opioids, so use naloxone if you have it. If someone hasn't overdosed on opioids, naloxone won't harm them.

You can get a naloxone kit and training on how to use it from your local With You service. More information about naloxone, including how to use it, can be found [here](#).

### **The law around synthetic cannabinoids**

Synthetic cannabinoids are a Class B drug, which means it's illegal to be found carrying or using. The legal term for this is possession. The maximum sentence for possession of a Class B drug is up to five years in prison, a fine or both.

It's also illegal to give away or sell synthetic cannabinoids. This is known as supply, and is a more serious offence than possession. It can be considered supply if you give your friend some or share some with them, and this could get you time in prison, an unlimited fine or both.



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### How to reduce harm while using

#### **Before you start, you might want to ask:**

- **"Is now the right time?"** How you're feeling when you use synthetic cannabinoids can impact the effects you may experience, so consider checking in with yourself and thinking about whether now is a good time for you.
- **Do not use alone. Have I contacted a friend or family member?** In case you need help, consider telling someone your plans.

#### **While you're using:**

- As strength can vary between batches, even if you take the drug regularly, starting with a small amount and waiting at least two hours before your next dose can help to reduce the risk of overdose – start low, go slow.
- Everyone responds differently to drugs – it's okay to go at your own pace, as trying to keep up with others puts you at greater risk of overdosing.
- It's best not to use synthetic cannabinoids if you're on your own or if you're in a position where there is nobody you can call for help. A buddy system – where one person takes their hit first and waits until the peak effects have worn off before the other person uses – makes it more likely that someone can help if someone overdoses.
- Inhaling deeply will not increase the effect of synthetic cannabinoids, but it could damage your lungs, so try and take small and short puffs if smoking.
- Try and use synthetic cannabinoids on its own, as mixing it with other drugs or alcohol can increase your risk of overdose.
- Mixing synthetic cannabinoids with tobacco can lead to nicotine dependence and increase risk of longer-term harms, so take extra care if you smoke with tobacco.
- Where you are when you take synthetic cannabinoids can impact the effects you may experience, so try and find a space where you feel safe, and comfortable and are with people you can trust.
- It's common to get a dry mouth when using synthetic cannabinoids, so sipping water regularly can help.
- The recovery position helps to prevent someone unconscious from choking



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on vomit. If someone is unconscious, putting them in the recovery position, getting help if needed, and staying with them will help to reduce the risk of harm.

**After using cannabis session:**

- Look after and be kind to yourself – get plenty of sleep and rest, and try to avoid taking more to give your body time to recover.
- Refuelling will help your recovery – this includes drinking plenty of water and eating something nutritious which is soft on your stomach and not too rich.

**If you’re feeling low and feel you can’t talk to a friend or family member, contact us for help – we provide free, confidential and non-judgemental advice:** <https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/find-support/talk-to-a-trained-recovery-worker>

**Synthetic cannabinoid withdrawal signs, symptoms, and what to do**

If your body develops a tolerance to synthetic cannabinoids, you may feel you need to take more to get the same effects.

Regular use can lead to physical withdrawal symptoms when you try to stop or cut back.

It’s important not to stop suddenly as this can be dangerous. We recommend getting professional support to cut down.

Withdrawal symptoms include:

- feel moody and irritable
- feel sick
- find it hard to sleep or eat
- experience sweating and shaking
- get diarrhoea