

# How do you look after someone who is ‘greening out’ on cannabis?

**Helping someone who is drug-affected can be difficult and potentially dangerous. Often, the person may be aggressive and un-cooperative. While it is important to try to keep your friend safe, the first priority must always be your personal safety. Never be afraid to pass the problem over to someone else, particularly if they become violent. If in doubt, always call 000.**

**ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU ARE A FRIEND, NOT A DOCTOR.**

If someone is ‘greening out’ after smoking cannabis, there are some simple things you can do to look after that person to try to keep them as safe as possible:

- **Stay with them and never leave them alone**
- **Take them to a safe place**
- **Monitor them**

- **Reassure them**
- **Keep them comfortable**
- **Keep them upright**
- **Give them something to drink**
- **If in doubt, call for help**

If your friend is vomiting extra care needs to be taken. Vomiting can be life-threatening even when alcohol or other drugs are not involved. If you are worried about a friend’s wellbeing, for any reason, call 000 immediately.

Be aware that the police do not routinely attend an ambulance call, even if there are illegal drugs involved. The only reason the police will usually attend is if the paramedics ask them to be there. This is usually due to another crime taking place or the threat of violence.

## What is ‘greening out’?

Greening out (also known as ‘whiting out’) is a term used to describe a situation where a person feels sick after smoking cannabis. They go pale (turning ‘green’ or ‘white’) and start to sweat, they feel dizzy and nauseous, and may even start vomiting. The experience can be quite frightening and users can become very anxious and start to panic. In extreme cases, the person may experience prolonged vomiting and even hallucinations. Cannabis users often report that the only way they can alleviate these symptoms is to lie down.

It is often described as a ‘cannabis overdose’ and is much more likely to occur if a person has been drinking alcohol before they start smoking. This has been explained by research that found when you have alcohol in your blood, you may absorb THC (the part of cannabis that gets you stoned) faster. So even though you have smoked what you believe to be a ‘normal’ amount of cannabis for you, because you have drunk alcohol, it gets absorbed quickly and can result in a much stronger, and often far more unpleasant effect than usual.

## What are the major dangers associated with ‘greening out’?

Although not always the case, most people who ‘green out’ have been drinking alcohol. Combining any two drugs increases the risk of something going wrong but when both drugs have depressant effects there is an increased risk that the central nervous system could be slowed down to dangerous levels. As such, these people need to be monitored carefully to make sure they are breathing properly.

Cannabis has an ‘antimetic’ effect, meaning that it makes it difficult for the body to vomit. When a person vomits after drinking, it is the body protecting itself from being poisoned by emptying the contents of the stomach, preventing more alcohol from being absorbed and reaching the brain. If they aren’t able to vomit properly and they have drunk a lot, they are at greater risk of choking on their vomit or succumbing to the effects of alcohol poisoning.

Another problem that ‘greening out’ can cause are panic attacks. These can be very frightening, with the person experiencing them often believing they will die or lose total control. Although panic attacks

### Medical Disclaimer

The information provided on this fact sheet is provided for information purposes only. As such it **cannot substitute for the advice of a medical professional**

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can be alarming, they're relatively harmless and usually pass. The person often finds breathing difficult, laboured or far too fast and they may have difficulty swallowing. The user can be sweating or trembling. They may complain of a headache, backache, chest pains or palpitations.

### Things to do if your friend is 'greening out'

- **Stay with them and never leave them alone** – being alone when you are unwell is not only frightening but incredibly dangerous. There are so many things that can go wrong when a person is greening out it is vital that they are watched at all times
- **Take them to a safe place** – it is important that these people are taken to a place where they will feel safe. It should be away from crowds, loud music or noise and bright lights as they should not be over-stimulated, this is particularly important if they are hallucinating or having a panic attack
- **Monitor them** – there are so many things that can go wrong when greening out, it is vital they are watched carefully. You are dealing with the effects of two drugs so it becomes much more difficult. The real dangers involve vomiting and ensuring they are breathing properly
- **Reassure them** – this experience is usually very frightening. Most people will recover without any major issues but it certainly isn't going to feel that way! Keep talking to them and make sure they know that you're not going to leave them and that everything will be okay – it'll just take some time. If they are experiencing a panic attack and they are finding it difficult to breathe (it is rapid and irregular), get them to breathe more slowly by copying your breathing (in through the nose, out through the mouth)
- **Keep them comfortable** – if they are very drunk the alcohol can cause their body temperature to drop and possibly lead to hypothermia. Drape something over their shoulders, particularly if they are outdoors
- **Keep them upright** – laying down is often the only thing that will stop them feeling nauseous, however, they are much more difficult to monitor effectively in that position and there is always the risk of choking if they vomit. If they are not able to sit up then lay them on their side in the recovery position

- **Give them something to drink** – some believe that greening out could be caused by a drop in blood sugar and giving the person something sweet to drink, like a juice, will help. Some even suggest getting them to drink water with a spoonful of sugar in it. At the very least, keep them hydrated by giving them an open bottle of water and say to them - "Drink when you feel like it" – they need to listen to their own body. Forcing them to drink large amounts of water is not going to make them feel any better and 'overhydrating' can actually cause harm in extreme cases
- **If in doubt, call for help** – this does not always mean calling 000 – most people who are greening out do not need to be treated by medical professionals. That said, looking after someone going through this experience can be very scary, particularly for young people. As soon as you feel you're not able to deal with the situation, pass the problem onto a sober, responsible adult and, of course, if you think their life is in danger, call 000 immediately

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### Things to do once your friend is feeling better

- **Make sure they rehydrate** – alcohol dehydrates and this is one of the main causes of a hangover. If the person feels bad now, they're highly likely to feel much worse the morning after – drinking a couple of glasses of water at the end of the night is not going to completely prevent this but it won't hurt
- **Make sure they get home safely and check on them the day after** – this can be a traumatic and embarrassing experience, particularly if it happened at a party or gathering, and it can sometimes take a while for the person to recover. Getting them home or handing them over to someone you trust is extremely important but giving them a reassuring call the next day can make all the difference