

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 uncooperative. However, there are steps you can take to help a friend ‘greening out’ on cannabis feel more comfortable and to keep them as safe as possible.

Things to do if your friend is ‘greening out’ on cannabis:

- **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.

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.

It is illegal to use, possess, grow or sell cannabis in Australia, but the penalties for cannabis offences are different in each state and territory.

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, call 000.

ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU ARE A FRIEND, NOT A DOCTOR

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.

Greening out is often described as a ‘cannabis overdose’ and is much more likely to occur if the user has been drinking alcohol before they start smoking. Research evidence shows that because there is alcohol in the bloodstream, the THC (the part of cannabis that gets you stoned) is absorbed much faster. This 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, users need to be monitored carefully to make sure they are breathing properly.

Cannabis has an ‘antiemetic’ effect, meaning that it can prevent vomiting. 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 are unable to vomit and they have drunk a lot, they are at greater risk of alcohol poisoning.

Another problem that greening out can cause is 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; it may feel too slow or too fast and they may have difficulty swallowing. The user may also be sweating or trembling and 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 also potentially dangerous. There are so many things that can go wrong when a person is greening out that it is vital that they are watched at all times.

Take them to a safe place – it is important that your friend is taken to a place where they will feel safe. It should be away from crowds, bright lights, loud music or other sights and sounds that could over-stimulate them. This is particularly important if they are hallucinating or having a panic attack.

Monitor them – there are many things that can go wrong when a person feels this way and if you are dealing with the effects of more than one drug, things become even more difficult. It is vital that you watch your friend carefully, ensuring that they are breathing properly and looked after properly if they start to vomit.

Reassure them – greening out can be very frightening. Most people will recover without any major issues but it certainly isn't going to feel that way at the time! Keep talking to your friend. They need to be reassured that the experience will end in time and that you will stay with them until they get better. If they are experiencing a panic attack and they are finding it difficult to breathe (their breathing 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, possibly leading to hypothermia. If your friend is cold and shivering, place something warm around them, particularly if they are outdoors.

Keep them as upright as possible – 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 your friend

is not able to sit up, then lay them on their side in the recovery position.

Give them something to drink – some people believe that a drop in blood sugar causes greening out and giving the person something sweet to drink, like a juice, will help. Some even suggest getting them to drink water mixed with some sugar. At the very least, it is important to keep them hydrated. Give them an open bottle of water and ask them to "Drink when you feel like it" – it's best that they listen to what their body is telling them. 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 have a bad experience after smoking cannabis do not need to be treated by medical professionals. Even so, looking after someone who feels this way 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.

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.

Make sure they get home safely and check on them the next day

Once they start to feel a little better, make sure they rehydrate before you let them leave. If they were drinking, 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.

'Greening out' can be a traumatic and embarrassing experience, particularly if it happened at a party or gathering, and it can take some time for the person to recover. Getting your friend home safely or handing them over to someone you trust is important but giving them a reassuring call the next day to make sure they're okay can make all the difference to how they cope with what happened to them.