



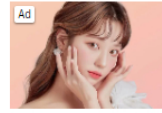
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From ice cream to sparkling water and dog chews: How cannabis goes 'under cover'

As other countries loosen their drug laws, young Singaporeans need to be even more discerning about marketing tactics of harmful substances



Controlled substances such as cannabis have been finding their way into everyday products such as ice cream and sparkling waters. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

PUBLISHED 7 HOURS AGO



A line of capsules, powders and oils that claim to promote better sleep, recovery and hydration. Sparkling waters, ice cream, and cookies available in an alluring array of flavours. Even a brand of dog chews that purport to ease one's furry friend's hip and joint pains.

Using marketing buzzwords like 'keto-friendly', 'small-batch' and 'organic', these products would not look at all out of place in any gourmet grocery store overseas. Only upon closer inspection would one realise they aren't everyday household items – these can actually contain cannabis even if they claim to contain only its derivative cannabidiol (CBD). Yes, even the dog chews.

Cannabis, sometimes known as hemp, is derived from any part of the plant genus Cannabis. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the main psychoactive substance in cannabis that causes users to feel "high", and is listed as a Class A controlled drug in Singapore. CBD, a core chemical compound found in the cannabis plant, does not cause the same "high" as THC, and can be found in a limited number of

pharmaceutical products.



The cannabis drug, in a bid to broaden its appeal, has been stealthily shedding its subversive image for one that's deceptively more 'wholesome'. This is after all an industry built on addiction, worth billions of dollars globally.

Even tobacco giants have vested interests – the British American Tobacco has invested in start-ups working on cannabis, CBD and other "wellness" products. In the US, many tobacco companies are also lending support to pro-cannabis groups lobbying for legislation.

Exploiting the use of modern packaging and design, and a deliberate association with the booming wellness industry, marketers of these products also align cannabis-derived products with mental wellbeing. A CBD-laced sparkling water brand, for example, claims to help you relax, while other cannabis products claim to help treat conditions such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, chronic pain, and more.

The harms behind the 'highs'



Studies have shown that daily cannabis and high-potency abusers are three and five times more likely to develop psychotic disorders as compared with those who have ever abused the drug. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

But many health experts warn that despite its veneer of wellness, cannabis abusers face higher risks of developing mental health issues.



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In a study that involved 2,000 participants from 11 sites across Europe and Brazil, daily cannabis and high-potency abusers were found to be respectively three times and five times more likely to develop psychotic disorders than those who had never abused the drug.

The effects of short-term use of cannabis-derived products include intoxication and panic attacks, while long-term use is associated with addiction, stroke, and increased risk of cancer.

Based on a scientific review by the ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, cannabis abuse can also increase the risk of a fatal accident by two- to seven-fold. A 2019 study of the impact of cannabis legalisation in Colorado found that since recreational marijuana was permitted, traffic deaths, in which drivers tested positive for the drug, increased drastically by 109 per cent.

Street cannabis across the world has become substantially stronger over the past 50 years, a 2020 study by the Addiction and Mental Health Group at the University of Bath revealed. Higher concentrations of THC have also been linked to a four-fold increased risk of addiction, says a study published in the journal *Lancet Psychiatry* in July 2022.

Many CBD products, which purport to be non-addictive as they are supposedly free of THC, have also been found to contain the substance, contrary to label claims.

There is still a lack of sufficient evidence to prove the effectiveness of cannabinoids for most medical conditions. In the US, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has only approved one CBD-based pharmaceutical for the treatment of seizures associated with two rare and severe forms of epilepsy. In Singapore, drug control policies are underpinned by evidence and research. Although regulators allow safe and controlled access to evidence-based medical treatment options, cannabis remains an illicit drug.

Seeing past the deception

Nevertheless, the influence of the media has led to some misguided notions about cannabis use.

In 2019, celebrity influencer Kim Kardashian threw a CBD-themed baby shower, where guests were invited to make their own CBD-infused bath salts and body oils as they zoned out to meditation sessions. Other celebrities like Seth Rogen and Snoop Dogg also have no qualms about flaunting their use of the drug across their social media platforms.

A survey of 1,055 Singapore residents by public opinion company YouGov and The Straits Times found that 26 per cent of Singaporeans aged between 18 and 24 perceived cannabis to be not harmful or not very harmful, with about 21 per cent in the same age group saying they had considered trying a controlled substance.

With Thailand being the latest country to remove cannabis from its list of controlled drugs, there may be some who believe that cannabis is a “safe” drug to try during a weekend overseas trip.

However, [as much research has previously shown](#), cannabis is an addictive drug. Among those who used cannabis, about 1 in 10 will develop dependence. This increases to 1 in 2 among those who use cannabis daily.

Even Thai authorities have strongly discouraged personal use of cannabis for non-medical reasons, after [recent incidents of hospitalisation following cannabis overdose](#) came to light.

Under Singapore's Misuse of Drugs Act, any Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident found to have abused drugs overseas will be treated as if they had abused drugs within Singapore. The CNB conducts enforcement checks at Singapore's checkpoints and will take action against those found to have consumed drugs overseas.

Besides the legal consequences, it's the long-term adverse effects of cannabis on one's physical and mental health that should give anyone pause to even try. And that's something that no amount of rebranding can hide.

For more facts, myths and other useful resources on cannabis, refer to the CNB's

Consumption of controlled drugs outside Singapore

Advisory:

- It is an offence for citizens and Singapore Permanent Residents to consume drugs in Singapore and overseas.
- Consumption of a controlled drug (for example, "ice", heroin and cannabis) is an offence and a person will face imprisonment of up to 10 years, or a fine not exceeding S\$20,000, or both.

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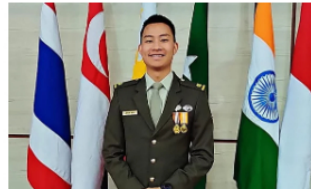
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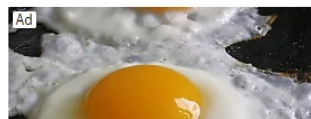
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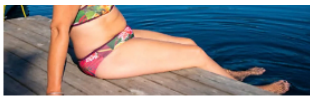
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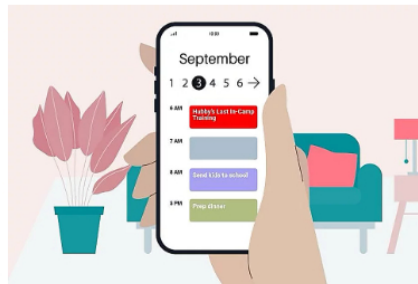
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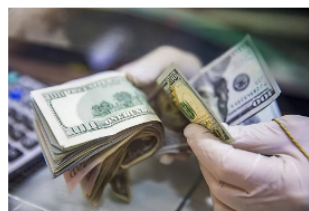
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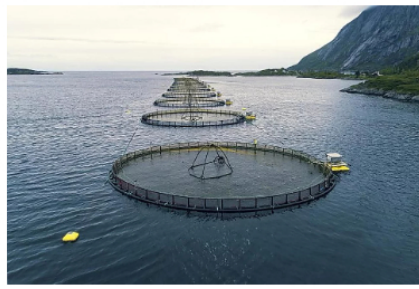
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