

SPOTLIGHT on

Marijuana



**Drug Abuse
Prevention Series**

WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana comes from the cannabis sativa plant, also known as the hemp plant. It is grown all over the world, especially in tropical climates.

Marijuana is a mixture of the plant's crushed leaves and flowers. It looks like dried parsley.



Marijuana can be smoked as a cigarette (joint), in a pipe (bowl), in a water pipe (bong) or using vaping devices like mechanical mods, modified electronic cigarettes or hookahs.



Marijuana can also be eaten, for example in pot brownies. When eaten, the effects are not as predictable because the body absorbs THC, the mind-altering ingredient, more slowly.

WHAT'S IN MARIJUANA?

Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the mind-altering ingredient in marijuana. THC is responsible for the "high" that users feel.

The typical amount of THC in marijuana ranges from 12% to 36%—much more potent than it was a few decades ago. More THC means more side effects.



Marijuana smoke contains more than 400 chemicals. Many are known carcinogens. Some are the same chemicals found in tobacco. And because marijuana smokers tend

to inhale deeply and hold their breath longer than cigarette smokers, their lungs are exposed to even more smoke.

Smoking one marijuana joint deposits FOUR times as much tar into the lungs as smoking one tobacco cigarette.

Who Uses Marijuana?

Marijuana is the most commonly abused illegal drug in the United States.

About 45% of teens have tried marijuana by the time they graduate from high school; 17% of eighth graders have tried it.

TYPES OF MARIJUANA

A JOINT is a rolled-up marijuana cigarette.



A ROACH is the burned-down end of a marijuana cigarette.



A BLUNT is a split or hollowed-out cigar filled with marijuana.



HASHISH is a concentrated extract of the cannabis plant. It is usually sold as a dark gummy ball, and contains higher levels of THC than ordinary marijuana.



HASH OIL is thick, concentrated oil that has higher levels of THC than hashish.



Special Bulletin: Synthetic Marijuana



Synthetic marijuana is a blend of herbs and plant material that is sprayed with synthetic cannabinoids—man-made chemicals that bind to the

same receptors in the brain as THC. Known by the brand names K2 and Spice, these drugs are sold as herbal incense or potpourri.

Synthetic marijuana produces effects similar to or even more potent than marijuana. Using the drug can cause difficulty breathing, racing heartbeat, vomiting, tremors, extreme anxiety, panic attacks and convulsions.

In July 2012, under the Synthetic Drug Abuse Prevention Act, not only are common cannabinoids now listed as Schedule I controlled substances, but analogues of these chemicals are banned as well under the federal Analogue Act section of the Federal Controlled Substances Act.

MARIJUANA AND THE BODY

THE LUNGS:

Smoking marijuana irritates the air passages and kills cilia in the lungs. Regular users often develop a chronic cough that can progress into lung diseases such as bronchitis, emphysema and lung cancer.



THE MOUTH:

Regular use of marijuana may lead to cancer of the mouth, the larynx and the upper jaw.

THE CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM:

Marijuana raises the user's heart rate and blood pressure, increasing the risk of premature stroke and heart attack.



THE STOMACH:

Marijuana increases appetite but slows the digestive process. When eaten, marijuana can cause nausea.

MUSCLES:

Marijuana acts as a muscle relaxant and can interfere with a user's normal reflexes even after the high has ended.

BODY TISSUE:

THC is stored in fatty areas of the body and can be detected in the body for up to 28 days after use.

THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM:

In females, marijuana use can disrupt the menstrual cycle and lead to fertility problems. In males, marijuana lowers the sperm count and may cause irregular sperm cells to form.



Short-Term Effects

Side effects vary from person to person and depend on the THC level in the marijuana and how much marijuana was used.

- Delusions
- Increased appetite ("munchies")
- Increased heart rate
- Bloodshot eyes
- Dry mouth and throat
- Dizziness
- Loss of short-term memory
- Altered sense of time
- Impaired judgment
- Mood swings
- Inability to concentrate on tasks
- Loss of coordination
- Loss of depth perception



Long-Term Damage

- Risk of brain damage
- Mental depression
- Reduced immunity to infections
- Impaired memory and ability to learn
- Hallucinations and paranoia
- Chronic lung diseases such as bronchitis and emphysema
- Heart disease
- Increased risk of lung cancer
- Irregular ovulation in females
- Decreased sperm count in males



Marijuana and the Brain



Marijuana stimulates brain cells to release a neurotransmitter called dopamine, which results in a sense of euphoria. Most users report feeling relaxed and some also report heightened sensory perception, altered perception of time and increased appetite. Marijuana can also cause anxiety, paranoia and distortion of reality.

Recent research has discovered that THC can cause serious impairments to the teen brain. Marijuana significantly affects a part of the brain called the hippocampus—crucial to forming new memories—which impairs a person's ability to learn new information. This effect can last for days or even weeks after the initial high has worn off. The National Institute on Drug Abuse warns, "Someone who smokes marijuana every day may be functioning at a suboptimal intellectual level all of the time."

THC also affects the cerebellum, which helps control balance and coordination. This impairs athletic performance and driving ability. In fact, driving after using marijuana increases your risk of being involved in an accident—and it's illegal in all 50 states.

Marijuana is also linked to psychosis and schizophrenia in people who are genetically predisposed to these mental illnesses. Using marijuana as a teenager increases the risk of developing psychosis even more for these individuals.

Marijuana and Sports

Think you can smoke pot and perform your best?

THINK AGAIN!



THC actually binds to receptors in your brain that control balance, posture, coordination, and reaction time—all things that are important to athletic performance. In addition, marijuana smokers can have many of the same respiratory problems as tobacco smokers, such as a daily cough and phlegm production.

Marijuana and the Law

Even though marijuana has recently been legalized for recreational and medical purposes in a few states, it is still classified as a Schedule 1 drug by the federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). This means that it has a high potential for abuse. Currently, possessing or selling marijuana is a crime in many states.



Legal penalties vary from state to state. Depending upon where you live, you could face fines, jail time and/or loss of your driver's license for the use or possession of even small amounts of marijuana.

Using marijuana can also seriously affect your future. Testing positive on a drug screening test can cost you your job. A marijuana conviction can also hurt your chances of getting into college, getting financial aid and getting hired in the future.

LEGAL DOESN'T MEAN SAFE!

SOME THINGS HAVEN'T CHANGED...

Even as laws related to marijuana are changing across the United States, certain restrictions continue to exist. Regardless of your state's laws about possession or use of marijuana, some things haven't changed. For instance:

- Just as with alcohol, marijuana is still illegal for anyone under 21.
- It's still illegal to sell marijuana without a special license.
- All states have strict laws against driving under the influence of any drug, including marijuana.
- It's illegal to go on your school campus with marijuana. Students who bring pot to school risk getting suspended, expelled or may face criminal prosecution.

Is Marijuana Addictive?



Each year, more than 7.1 million people in the U.S. abuse marijuana. More than 1 million people receive treatment for marijuana dependence each year—more than for any other illicit drug.

Someone who is dependent on marijuana has difficulty controlling his or her marijuana use. He or she can't stop using, even though it has negative effects on his or her family, work, school and social life.

Approximately 1 in 6 people who begin smoking pot as a teenager will become dependent on the drug.

Users who are dependent on marijuana may also experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop using, such as irritability, trouble sleeping, decreased appetite, craving and anxiety.

Getting Help

If you or someone you know needs help dealing with a substance abuse problem, please seek help immediately.

National Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Information Center
1-800-784-6776

SMART Recovery
www.smartrecovery.org/addiction/marijuana.htm

Marijuana Anonymous
www.marijuana-anonymous.org

The SAMHSA National Clearinghouse for Drug Information
1-800-729-6686

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) hotline
1-800-662-HELP

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