

Marijuana

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Marijuana is a green, brown or gray mixture of dried, shredded leaves, stems, seeds and flowers of the hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa*). Marijuana, a mind-altering drug, has more than 200 slang names on the street such as “bud,” “chronic,” “dope,” “grass,” “herb,” “pot,” “Mary Jane,” “reefer” and “weed,” among others.

Most users smoke marijuana in hand-rolled cigarettes (joints), cigars (blunts), or pipes/water pipes (bongs). Marijuana may be brewed in tea or mixed with foods. Stronger forms of marijuana made from the cannabis plant include sinsemilla, hashish and hash oil.

Marijuana use interferes with family, school, work and recreational activities. Studies show that:

- students who use marijuana get lower grades and are less likely to graduate from high school than students who do not smoke marijuana
- workers who smoke marijuana are more likely than co-workers who do not smoke to miss more work, have more accidents, change jobs more often, leave without permission and daydream.

Most marijuana used in the United States comes from Mexico. Strong marijuana has also entered the U.S. drug market from Canada.

Addiction

Marijuana causes addiction. The active ingredient in marijuana (known as THC) changes the parts of the brain that affect pleasure, memory, thought, concentration, sensory and time perception, and coordinated movement. The amount of THC in marijuana has risen greatly since 1980, meaning that marijuana today is “stronger.”

When smoking marijuana, effects begin right away and last from 1 to 3 hours. When eating or drinking marijuana in foods or beverages, effects begin in about 30 to 60 minutes and last for 4 hours.

Smoking marijuana leads to changes in the brain similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin and alcohol. As the THC enters the brain, it causes the user to feel high. The user may have:

- dry mouth
- feelings of pleasure (being in a good mood, feeling silly)
- loss of coordination
- poor sense of balance
- rapid heartbeat.

The user may also see colors and hear sounds that seem more intense, sense time passing slowly, and have sudden hunger (the munchies). When coming down from a high, the user may feel sleepy or depressed.

Effects of Marijuana Use

Marijuana can cause the following effects.

■ Short-term:

- anxiety, panic attacks
- increased heart rate
- problems with short-term memory, learning, attention, coordination, balance and judgment
- respiratory infections.

■ Long-term (regular use):

- addiction
- chest colds and bronchitis
- daily cough and phlegm
- increased risk of cancer of the head, neck, respiratory tract and lungs
- risk of lung infections (including emphysema).

Effects of marijuana use depend on how strong the marijuana is, how it is taken and if other drugs are being taken at the same time.

Some long-term users have withdrawal symptoms (irritability, problems sleeping, anxiety, loss of appetite and shaky hands) when they try to stop using.

Problems (Complications)

Marijuana use causes depression, anxiety and personality disturbances. It affects the user's ability to learn and remember. Users who drive while high are at risk for causing accidents.

Marijuana — especially when taken with alcohol — affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time.

- A woman who smokes marijuana during pregnancy puts the baby at risk for development problems.
- A woman who smokes during the first month of breastfeeding can affect the baby's development.
- A user who ate or drank high doses of marijuana can have hallucinations, delusions and a loss of personal identity.

Treatment

There are no medicines available to treat marijuana addiction. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps the user learn coping skills to help break the cycle.

CBT teaches the user to recognize the situations in which he or she is most likely to use marijuana, how to avoid those situations and how to cope with the problems that go with drug abuse.

**Information adapted from the White House
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