



## Stay Ahead of Substance Abuse

### Marijuana

*What every parent and caregiver needs to know about marijuana.*

Marijuana is a drug that contains THC, the psychoactive ingredient that raises dopamine in the brain.

**Physical** signs and symptoms of someone using marijuana include:

- Rapid heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased rate of breathing
- Red eyes
- Dry mouth
- Increased appetite, or "the munchies"
- Slowed reaction time

These effects are reduced after three or four hours. However, marijuana hangs around in your system for as long as a month after smoking. The lingering effects mean you're impaired for several days to weeks after the high wears off.

### **Psychological** Effects of Marijuana

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the main effects of marijuana on mood vary and may include euphoria, calmness, anxiety, or paranoia.

Other short-term psychological effects of pot include:

- Distorted sense of time
- Paranoia
- Magical or "random" thinking
- Short-term memory loss
- Anxiety and depression

These psychological signs of using pot also generally ease after a few hours. But residual effects can last for days.

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With 20+ states legalizing marijuana for medicinal purposes and 2 states legalizing it for recreational use, many myths about marijuana are growing and need to be explained. Read below to see if the following are **myths** or true statements.

**Marijuana is natural:** This statement is **FALSE**.

While marijuana is a mixture of the dried and shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers of the **cannabis** sativa plant, the marijuana that people purchase to use to get “stoned” or “high” has 400 different chemicals in it. The THC level is also manipulated by growers to be much stronger than it used to be. (See below.)

**Marijuana “today” is not the same as it was in the 1970’s.** This statement is **TRUE**.

The marijuana used today is stronger than it used to be, but not as strong as has been written in some media reports. Depending on how analysis was conducted and the sample analyzed, marijuana strength has increased by 7 times since the 1970s, measured by THC levels. Another difference between then and now is that marijuana users in the 1970s were most likely to smoke the leaves and initiate use around 20 years of age. Marijuana users today, however, start in their mid-teens and prefer to smoke the more potent flowering tops, (buds) of the plant. Research shows that young, regular (daily or near daily) users are most at risk for many of the adverse effects of marijuana, including mental health problems and dependence. - See more at: <http://adai.uw.edu/marijuana/factsheets/potency.htm#sthash.7wXkHEkf.dpuf>

**Marijuana is not addictive.** This statement is **FALSE**.

1 in 11 people that smoke marijuana will become dependent on it. This risk rises to 1 in 6 when use begins in adolescence. How do we know that marijuana is addictive? People that use it on a regular basis experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop using it. These withdrawal symptoms may vary from irritability and sleeplessness to decreased appetite, anxiety, and drug cravings. While experiencing withdrawal may not be life-threatening like it is with alcohol or heroin, the fact that the body has any withdrawal symptoms at all indicates that there was a dependency on it. Aside from withdrawal symptoms, addiction is evident when speaking to those who have sought treatment or gotten into legal trouble because of their use. The heart-breaking stories of things that people lose range from losing jobs to losing custody of one’s children. They lose the same important things in their lives as people that are addicted to alcohol, heroin, meth, or prescription drugs.

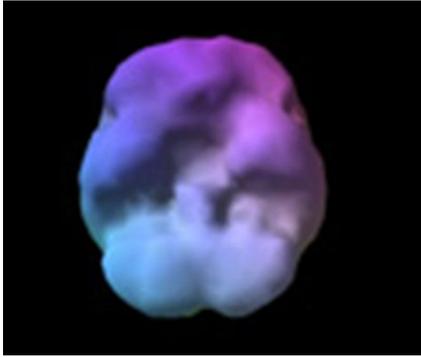
**Marijuana is a gateway drug:** This statement is **TRUE**.

While most people that use marijuana do not go on to use anything “harder” such as cocaine, heroin, or meth, studies have shown that people that DO use harder drugs have used marijuana first. This is especially true of people that become addicted to marijuana. When smoking marijuana no longer produces the “high” that an addicted person used to feel, they must turn to something stronger or harder to get that feeling that they used to get from marijuana.

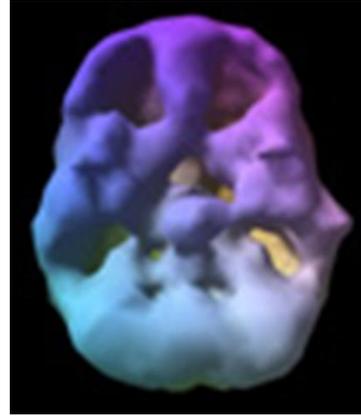
**Marijuana is harmless.** This statement is **FALSE**.

As previously stated, marijuana contains over **400 chemicals** and the smoke contains **50 to 70% more cancer-causing substances than tobacco smoke**. Marijuana raises heart rate by 20-100 percent shortly after smoking; this effect can last up to 3 hours. In one study, it was estimated that marijuana users have a **4.8-fold increase in the risk of heart attack** in the first hour after smoking the drug. This risk may be greater in older individuals or in those with cardiac vulnerabilities. Marijuana use during **pregnancy** is associated with increased risk **of neurobehavioral problems in babies**. Because THC and other compounds in marijuana mimic the body’s own endocannabinoid chemicals, marijuana use by pregnant mothers may alter the developing endocannabinoid system in the brain of the fetus. Consequences for the child may include **problems with attention, memory, and problem solving**.

Additionally, because it seriously impairs judgment and motor coordination, marijuana contributes to **risk of injury or death while driving a car**. A recent analysis of data from several studies found that marijuana use more than doubles a driver's risk of being in an accident.



Healthy Brain Underside Surface View



18 y/o – 3 year history of 4x week use  
underside surface view

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana>

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