

Facts about Marijuana

The legalization of recreational marijuana does not mean it is safe. Marijuana is more potent and used in a wider variety of forms than it was decades ago. Be a trusted source of accurate information for the young people in your life.

1. Marijuana can be dangerous, especially for young people.



Children and adolescents are most susceptible to the harmful effects of marijuana. It can cause cognitive impairment, including problems of memory, concentration, and judgement. It also can increase the risk of developing anxiety, depression, and psychosis.^{1,8,10} Heavy use of marijuana can lead to changes in the brain similar those caused by cocaine, heroin, and alcohol.^{2,4,8}

Regular marijuana use harms more than just those who use the drug. It hurts the babies born to users. Families and communities of users are also negatively affected when users commit crimes or cause motor vehicle accidents. These all cause loss of productivity, limitation of educational attainment, and contribution to illness and injuries that put a strain on the health care system.⁹

2. Marijuana is addictive



Although it was once believed that marijuana was not addictive, recent studies show that it can lead to dependence and some heavy users develop withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, and difficulty sleeping while trying to quit use.^{5,7} Marijuana use, in fact, often associated with behavior that meets the criteria for substance dependence established by the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)³ and about 1 in 10 marijuana users will become addicted. For people who begin using before the age of 18, that number rises to 1 in 6.⁴

3. Marijuana today is much stronger than it was in the past



The average THC content in marijuana hovered around 4% in the 80's and 90's.¹⁷ In 2017 it was more than 17.1%.¹⁸ Marijuana concentrates and resins, which contain concentrated THC removed from the marijuana plant, have three to five times more THC than the plant itself. Some concentrated marijuana products, like dabs or waxes, may contain as much as 80 percent THC.¹⁹ Smoking or eating marijuana resins with very high THC concentrations is popular. Often it is very hard to control how much THC is ingested.¹⁹ Smoking, vaping or ingesting high-potency marijuana can cause serious side effects. In fact, high doses of THC can trigger psychotic episodes, which is one of the main reasons for emergency department visits associated with marijuana use.¹⁹ Greater marijuana potency means a smaller amount can make someone higher, faster – and perhaps far more intoxicated than they expect.

4. Marijuana does affect driving



After alcohol, marijuana is the drug most often linked with drugged driving. Marijuana negatively affects several skills required for safe driving. Large doses of marijuana can impair coordination, affect perception and cause difficulty in problem solving thus slowing reaction time and ability to make decisions while driving.^{14,15} Dosage is very hard to determine with unregulated edibles and resins. The risk of impaired driving increases when marijuana is used in combination with alcohol.¹⁴

5. Marijuana can be just as dangerous as tobacco



Marijuana and tobacco cigarettes share many of the same toxic chemicals.^{10,12} The amount of tar inhaled, and the level of carbon monoxide absorbed by those who smoke marijuana, regardless of THC content, are three to five times greater than among tobacco smokers and there is 50-70% more cancer-causing material in marijuana smoke than in cigarette smoke.⁹

Smoking marijuana on a regular basis often leads to the same breathing problems as tobacco use, such as chronic coughing and wheezing, more frequent acute chest illnesses, and a tendency toward obstructed airways.^{5,8}

Research has determined marijuana smoking can cause potentially serious damage to the respiratory system and lungs.^{4,11} Also, daily use of relatively small amounts of marijuana (3 to 4 joints) has at least a comparable, if not greater effect on the respiratory system than the smoking of more than 20 tobacco cigarettes.⁹

6. Studies do not support using marijuana as treatment for cancer or other diseases



A small number of studies have found that smoking marijuana and man-made forms of the chemicals found in the marijuana plant may ease some of the side effects of chemotherapy such as treating nausea and vomiting.⁴

Few studies have found that marijuana can be helpful in treating neuropathic pain, another side effect of chemotherapy. However, relying solely on marijuana as treatment or for managing side effects while avoiding or delaying conventional medical care for cancer may have serious health consequences. Currently, there is not enough evidence to recommend that patients inhale or ingest marijuana as a treatment for cancer-related symptoms or side effects of cancer therapy.^{4,9}

7. Promoting marijuana use will not help solve the opioid epidemic



Researchers have found little evidence to support the claim that expanding access to medical cannabis by legalizing marijuana will reduce opioid overdose deaths in the United States.^{6,13}

There is currently a large and growing body of evidence showing that cannabis use increases, rather than decreases non-medical prescription opioid use and opioid use disorder.¹³

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