

Facts about Marijuana

Marijuana is the most abused illegal drug among youth in the United States. Teens use marijuana for many reasons. They might use because they are curious, to fit in or be cool, or they might be pressured to use it by other teens. Teens might also use marijuana to cope with anxiety, anger, depression, or boredom.

Marijuana is a green, brown, or gray mixture of dried, shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers of the hemp plant. Common names for marijuana include: cannabis, weed, grass, pot, hash, or hashish. Marijuana is smoked by rolling it into a cigarette (called a joint) or smoked in a pipe. When someone smokes marijuana, they feel the effects almost instantly, and they are considered "high." The high is produced by a chemical in marijuana called THC, which impacts the brain and other parts of the body. There are many short-term and long-term effects of smoking marijuana.

Short Term Effects:

In the short term, marijuana use can cause these problems for the body:

- Euphoria (high)
- Difficulty concentrating and paying attention
- Decreased perception and coordination
- Impaired judgment
- Slowed reaction time
- Decreased motivation
- Memory problems
- Red or bloodshot eyes
- Dry mouth
- Increased appetite
- Increased heart rate
- Anxiety, fear, distrust, or paranoia
- Panic attacks
- Sleep problems
- Unintentional injuries such as car crash

Long Term Effects:

Smoking marijuana often or over a long time can cause these problems for the body:

- Respiratory problems
- Reduced intellectual level (IQ)
- Negative effects on learning
- Decreased life satisfaction
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicidal thoughts
- Increased family problems, broken relationships

Other facts about marijuana that you should know.

Marijuana is linked with school failure. Marijuana's negative effects on attention, memory, and learning can last for days and sometimes weeks—especially if you use it often. Teens who smoke marijuana tend to get lower grades and are more likely to drop out of high school than teens who don't smoke marijuana. Marijuana use can also lower your IQ if you smoke it regularly in your teen years.

Longtime marijuana users report lower life satisfaction, memory and relationship problems, poorer mental and physical health, lower salaries, and less career success (Zwerling, 1990).

Because marijuana impairs judgment, it can put people at risk of harm. Marijuana, like most abused substances, can alter judgment. This can lead to risky behaviors that can expose the user to sexually transmitted diseases like HIV.

It is unsafe to drive after using marijuana. Marijuana affects skills required for safe driving—alertness, concentration, coordination, and reaction time. Marijuana makes it hard to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road. After alcohol, marijuana is the drug most often linked to car accidents, including those involving deaths.

Marijuana can be addictive. Not everyone who smokes marijuana will become addicted. However, repeated marijuana use can lead to addiction. This means that someone cannot stop using marijuana even though they want to.

Marijuana is considered a "gateway drug." People who use marijuana may be more likely to try other, more harmful drugs in the future.

Sources: National Institute on Drug Abuse; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.