

New Hope Medicine
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The Health Effects of Marijuana

Although legalization activists and many marijuana users believe smoking marijuana has no negative effects, scientific research indicates that marijuana use can cause many different health problems.

As with many choices we make in our lives, we must weigh the costs versus the benefits of our choices. This is particularly true with respect to medications we chose to use to help us deal with certain illnesses and symptoms.

This is especially true with respect to our decision to use medical marijuana.

Health Effects

- Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States
- When inhaled, it begins to affect users almost immediately and can last for one to three hours. When eaten in food, such as baked in brownies and cookies, the effects may take longer to begin, but usually last longer
- Using marijuana while under the influence of alcohol is **NOT RECOMMENDED!**
- Additional side-effects may become present when using both alcohol and marijuana.
- Marijuana will potentiate the effects of alcohol
- Using marijuana while under the influence of alcohol, narcotics/opiates, sedatives, tranquilizers and other mind or mood altering drugs (legal or illegal) is **NOT RECOMMENDED!**

Short-Term Effects

- Distorted perception (sights, sounds, time, touch)
 - Problems with memory and learning
 - Loss of coordination, motor skills
 - Trouble with thinking, judging, reasoning and problem solving
 - Increased heart rates, reduced blood pressure
- Please Note: While using (or within several hours of using marijuana) I should not drive, operate machinery or engage in activities that require me to be alert and/or respond quickly to surrounding events. I understand that if I drive while under the influence of marijuana I can be arrested for ‘driving under the influence’ (DUI).**

Do you experience withdrawals when you quit smoking marijuana?

Take the Marijuana Withdrawal Symptom Quiz:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/do-you-experience-marijuana-withdrawal-4114017>

Effects on the Brain

The active ingredient of marijuana, delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, acts on cannabinoid receptors on nerve cells and influences the activity of those cells. Some brain areas have many cannabinoid receptors, but other areas of the brain have few or none at all. Many cannabinoid receptors are found in the parts of the brain that influence pleasure, memory, thought, concentration, sensory and time perception, and coordinated movement.

When high doses of marijuana are used, usually when eaten in food rather than smoked, users can experience the following symptoms:

- Hallucinations
- Delusions
- Impaired memory
- Disorientation

Sometimes marijuana use can also produce anxiety, fear, distrust or panic. In some people use of marijuana can result in paranoia, psychotic symptoms, exacerbate schizophrenia in pre-disposed persons, produce apathy, depression or restlessness.

Effects on the Heart

Within a few minutes after smoking marijuana, the heart begins beating more rapidly and the blood pressure drops. Marijuana can cause the heartbeat to increase by 20 to 50 beats per minute, and can increase even more if other drugs are used at the same time.

Because of the lower blood pressure and higher heart rate, researchers found that users' risk for a heart attack is four times higher within the first hour after smoking marijuana, compared to their general risk of heart attack when not smoking.

Effects on the Lungs

Smoking marijuana, even infrequently, can cause burning and stinging of the mouth and throat, and cause heavy coughing. Scientists have found that regular marijuana smokers can experience the same respiratory problems as tobacco smokers do, including:

- Daily cough and phlegm production
- More frequent chest illnesses
- Increase risk of lung infections
- Obstructed airways
- Acute or chronic bronchitis
- Emphysema
- Laryngitis

Most marijuana smokers consume a lot less cannabis than cigarette smokers consume tobacco, however, the harmful effects of smoking marijuana should not be ignored. Marijuana contains more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke and because marijuana smokers typically inhale deeper and hold the smoke in their lungs longer than tobacco smokers, their lungs are exposed to those carcinogenic properties longer, when smoking.

What about Cancer?

Although one study found that marijuana smokers were three times more likely to develop cancer of the head or neck than non-smokers, that study could not be confirmed by further analysis.

Because marijuana smoke contains three times the amount of tar found in tobacco smoke and 50% more carcinogens, it would seem logical to deduce that there is an increased risk of lung cancer for marijuana smokers. However, researchers have not been able to definitively prove such a link because their studies have not been able to adjust for tobacco smoking and other factors that might increase the risk.

Studies linking marijuana smoking to lung cancer have also been limited by selection bias and small sample size. For example, the participants in those studies may have been too young to have developed lung cancer yet. Even though researchers have yet to 'prove' a link between smoking marijuana and lung cancer, regular smokers may want to consider the risk.

In the opinion of many researchers, marijuana smoke contains known carcinogens and smoking may increase the risk of respiratory diseases and cancers in the lung, mouth and tongue.

Effects of Exposure During Pregnancy or Breast Feeding

Several studies have found that children born to mothers who used marijuana during pregnancy, or breast feeding exhibit some problems with neurological or other developmental problems. According to those studies, pre & post natal marijuana exposure can cause:

- Altered responses to visual stimuli
- Increased tremulousness
- Problems with sustained attention and memory
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Other

Interactions with Other Medications

The risks, benefits and drug-drug interactions of marijuana are not fully understood. If I am taking medication or undergoing treatment for any medical condition, I understand that I should consult with my treating physician(s) before using marijuana and that I should not discontinue or modify my use of any medication or treatment previously prescribed unless advised to do so by my treating physician(s).

Development of Tolerance, Dependence and Withdrawals

Individuals may develop a tolerance to and/or dependence on marijuana. You may notice that you require increasingly higher doses of marijuana to achieve the same effects as before. Withdrawal symptoms include: feelings of depression, sadness, irritability, insomnia, restlessness, agitation, loss of appetite, trouble concentrating, sleep disturbances and unusual tiredness.

Symptoms of Overdose

This is relatively rare, but may involve symptoms of nausea, vomiting, hacking cough, disturbances in heart rhythms, numbness in hand, feet, arms or legs, anxiety attacks and incapacitation. If any of these occur, proceed to the nearest emergency room for evaluation.

Other

Additional risks and benefits associated with medical marijuana are not fully understood and its use may involve risks that have not been identified so far. Ask questions, do your own research and by all means use medical marijuana carefully and wisely. As a drug, it will undoubtedly present unknown or unexpected consequences that you should be on the alert for.

Bibliography

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