

MARIJUANA

Marijuana is the most commonly abused illicit drug in the United States. A dry, shredded green/brown mix of flowers, stems, seeds, and leaves of the hemp plant *Cannabis sativa*, it usually is smoked as a cigarette (joint, nail), or in a pipe (bong). It also is smoked in blunts, which are cigars that have been emptied of tobacco and refilled with marijuana, often in combination with another drug. It might also be mixed in food or brewed as a tea. As a more concentrated, resinous form it is called hashish and, as a sticky black liquid, hash oil. Marijuana smoke has a pungent and distinctive, usually sweet-and-sour odor. There are countless

street terms for marijuana including ***pot, herb, weed, grass, widow, ganja,*** and ***hash.*** The main active chemical in marijuana is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol).

The short-term effects of marijuana can include problems with memory and learning; distorted perception; difficulty in thinking and problem solving; loss of coordination; and increased heart rate. Research findings for long-term marijuana abuse indicate some changes in the brain similar to those seen after long-term abuse of other major drugs.

Effects on the Heart

One study has indicated that a user's risk of heart attack more than quadruples in the first hour after smoking marijuana. The researchers suggest that such an effect might occur from marijuana's effects on blood pressure and heart rate and reduced oxygen-carrying capacity of blood.

Effects on the Lungs

Even infrequent abuse can cause burning and stinging of the mouth and throat, often accompanied by a heavy cough. Someone who smokes marijuana regularly may have many of the same respiratory problems that tobacco smokers do, such as daily cough and phlegm production, more frequent acute chest illness, a heightened risk of lung infections, and a greater tendency to obstructed airways. Smoking marijuana possibly increases the likelihood of developing cancer of the head or neck.

contains irritants and carcinogens. In fact, marijuana smoke contains 50 to 70 percent more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than does tobacco smoke. In addition, marijuana users usually inhale more deeply and hold their breath longer than tobacco smokers do, which increases the lungs' exposure to carcinogenic smoke. These facts suggest that, puff for puff, smoking marijuana may be more harmful to the lungs than smoking tobacco.

Marijuana abuse also has the potential to promote cancer of the lungs and other parts of the respiratory tract because it

Effects of Heavy Marijuana Use on Learning and Social Behavior

Research clearly demonstrates that marijuana has the potential to cause problems in daily life or make a person's existing problems worse. Depression, anxiety and personality disturbances have been associated with chronic marijuana use. Because marijuana compromises the ability to learn and remember information, the more a person uses marijuana the more he or she is likely to fall behind in accumulating intellectual, job, or social skills. Moreover, research has shown that marijuana's adverse impact on memory and learning can last for days or weeks after the acute effects of the drug wear off.

Students who smoke marijuana get lower grades and are less likely to graduate from high school, compared with their nonsmoking peers. "Heavy" marijuana abusers had

more trouble sustaining and shifting their attention and in registering, organizing, and using information. As a result, someone who smokes marijuana every day may be functioning at a reduced intellectual level all of the time. However, some cognitive abilities may be restored in individuals who quit smoking marijuana, even after long-term heavy use.

Workers who smoke marijuana are more likely than their coworkers to have problems on the job. Several studies associate workers' marijuana smoking with increased absences, tardiness, accidents, workers' compensation claims, and job turnover. In another study, heavy marijuana abusers reported that the drug impaired several important measures of life achievement including cognitive abilities, career status, social life, and physical and mental health.

Addictive Potential

Long-term marijuana abuse can lead to addiction for some people; that is, they abuse the drug compulsively even though it interferes with family, school, work, and recreational activities. Drug craving and withdrawal symptoms can make it hard for long-term marijuana smokers to stop abusing the drug. People trying to quit report symptoms such as irritability, sleeplessness, and anxiety. They also display increased aggression on psychological tests, peaking approximately one week after the last use of the drug.