

# The Truth About Marijuana

Slang--Weed, Pot, Grass, Reefer, Ganja, Mary Jane, Blunt, Joint, Roach, Nail

**Marijuana affects your brain.** THC (the active ingredient in marijuana) affects damages the nerve cells in the part of the brain where memories are formed, making it hard to remember things.

**Marijuana affects your self-control.** Marijuana can seriously affect your sense of time and your ability to do things that require coordination-like driving. In 1998, nearly 77,000 people were admitted to emergency rooms suffering from marijuana-related problems. This was an increase of more than 373 percent since 1991.

**Marijuana affects your lungs.** There are more than 400 known chemicals in marijuana. A single joint contains four times as much cancer-causing tar as a filtered cigarette.

**Marijuana affects other aspects of your health.** Marijuana can limit your body's ability to fight off infection. It can increase your heart rate and lead to frequent chest colds. Some research even shows that long-term marijuana use can increase the risk of developing certain mental illnesses.

**Marijuana is not always what it seems.** Before it is sold, marijuana can be laced with other dangerous drugs without your knowledge. "Blunts"-hollowed-out cigars filled with marijuana-sometimes have substances such as crack cocaine, PCP, or embalming fluid added to them.

**Marijuana can be addictive.** As with alcohol and many other drugs, not everyone who uses marijuana becomes addicted, but some users do develop signs of dependence on the drug. They may experience such withdrawal symptoms as loss of appetite, sleep problems, weight loss, and shaky hands. In 1995, 165,000 people entered drug treatment programs to kick their marijuana habit.

**Know the law.** It is illegal to buy or sell marijuana. In most states, holding even small amounts of marijuana can lead to fines or arrest.

**Get the facts.** There is NO proof that smoking marijuana is healthy and tons of evidence that it is not healthy. Smoking any substance--tobacco, marijuana, or crack cocaine--increases your risk of developing pneumonia and other illnesses.

**Stay informed.** It has not yet been proven that using marijuana leads to using other drugs. But, the fact is very few people use other drugs without first using marijuana. Teens who smoke marijuana are more likely to try other drugs, in part because they have more contact with people who use and sell them.

**Know the risks.** Using marijuana or other drugs increases your risk of injury from car crashes, falls, burns, drowning, and other accidents.

**Keep your edge.** Marijuana affects your judgment, drains your motivation, and can make you feel anxious.

**Look around you.** Most teens aren't smoking marijuana. According to a 1997 study, four out of five 12- to 17-year-old youth had never even tried marijuana.

How can you tell if a friend is using marijuana? Sometimes it's tough to tell. But there are signs you can look for. If your friend has one or more of the following warning signs, he or she may be using marijuana:

- Seeming dizzy and having trouble walking
- Having red, bloodshot eyes
- Having a hard time remembering things that just happened
- Acting disinterested in school, family, or activities he or she used to enjoy
- Acting silly for no apparent reason

What can you do to help someone who is using marijuana or other drugs? Be a real friend. Encourage your friend to seek professional help. The ASAP Program can help or refer you to help: (602) 953-2727

**Q.** Isn't smoking marijuana less dangerous than smoking cigarettes?

**A.** No. It's even worse. One joint affects the lungs as much as four cigarettes.

**Q.** Can people become addicted to marijuana?

**A.** Yes. Research confirms you can become hooked on marijuana.

**Q.** Can marijuana help cure cancer?

**A.** No. Some people with cancer, HIV/AIDS, and other diseases claim to experience relief from pain and other symptoms that they attribute to marijuana use. However, scientific research has not yet confirmed these benefits and more research on this topic is being done. What is known is that smoking marijuana can cause lung damage.

## Research Results on Marijuana

Much of the argument, pro and con, over marijuana has been based on erroneous information gleaned from inconclusive and often contradictory results. Only in recent years has research been done with exact, measured doses of Delta-9-THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), the active ingredient in marijuana.

Parents who oppose their children using marijuana have had too few facts based on irrefutable research at their disposal. The latest research, reported here, shows that marijuana is definitely a harmful and dangerous drug.

## HARM TO THE BODY

**Cellular Damage** -- According to Dr. Gabriel Nahas of Columbia University, marijuana interferes with the body's production of genetic material which controls cell division, thereby weakening the body's immunity to disease. Dr. Forrest Tennant, Director of the UCLA drug treatment center, indicates that there is a very close relationship between this disruption of the immune system and the development of cancer. By using radioactive THC, scientists have learned that marijuana byproducts remain in the body tissue for many days. Therefore the person who smokes pot weekly or more regularly is never free from the drug.

**Lung Damage** -- Dr. Tennant conducted research involving US military personnel in Europe who used hashish, a concentrated marijuana resin. According to his report, sick call was filled with soldiers each day with sore throats, sinus trouble, and coughs, which difficulties were highly increased in soldiers using hashish regularly. The hashish users also developed acute bronchitis and other lung problems, leading to more extensive tests. It was found that soldiers using hashish on a regular basis had considerable lung damage. During the past two years, 31 soldiers volunteered to have biopsies taken of their lungs. They showed in all cases precancerous lesions (the biopsies were analyzed by Dr. Oscar Auerbach, an authority on pulmonary pathology, and by pathologists at Duke University, at UCLA, and at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.)

**Gynecomastia** -- Two surgeons, Dr. Aliapoulios and Dr. John Harmon, reported in the New England Journal of Medicine that they have treated 12 young men, all heavy users of marijuana, age 22-26, for enlargement of the breasts (gynecomastia). Not only did the breasts become enlarged and swell painfully, but their nipples discharged a white, milky liquid. These doctors concluded that there is a positive correlation between heavy marijuana use and breast enlargement.

## BRAIN DAMAGE

**Impairs Short Term Memory** -- The breakdown products of marijuana accumulate, especially in brain tissues, according to Dr. Walter X. Lehmann, who has done many years of research on marijuana use. Dr. Lehmann reports that marijuana and other hallucinogens produce a kind of short-circuit in the brain. Five to 10 milligrams of marijuana smoked significantly decreases psychomotor performance and produces a significant impairment of immediate memory change, Dr. Lehmann said. When that dose is doubled the following are produced: psychotic-like state, panic reactions, delusions, and hallucinations.

**Flashbacks** -- While heavy marijuana use destroys the short term memory of the smoker to the degree that he cannot carry on a normal conversation, it also causes flashbacks. The user may experience a hallucination for a few seconds at a time while studying, talking, or driving, even though he has not had any of the drug for many days, according to Dr. Lehmann. Research by two Philadelphia psychiatrists showed that brain damage in young regular marijuana users has been duplicated elsewhere, Dr. Lehmann said. Their conclusion is now recognized as authentic and valid, he said.

## DESTRUCTION OF PERSONALITY

Dr. Andrew Malcolm, a psychiatrist working with drug users in New York, Toronto, and London for 20 years, said that users become listless, apathetic, and lose their drive. He said in areas of the world where marijuana has been used for centuries, large segments of the population become lethargic, do less work, suffer time distortion, and become less interested in personal hygiene.

**The No-Care Syndrome** -- When a teenager uses the drug three or more times a week for more than three months, he enters the “no care” syndrome, according to Dr. Lehmann. Changes in his personality and life are very subtle, but he loses interest in almost everything, except drugs. This syndrome has also been observed and reported by Dr. Dana Farnsworth of Harvard University, who labels it “amotivational syndrome,” and David Smith, director of the Haight-Asbury Free Clinic.

**Reduces Slow-Wave Sleep** -- Investigation conducted at the University of Texas Research Division shows that marijuana reduces the amount of slow-wave, or stage three and four sleep, the deepest stages of sleep. Loss of this slow-wave sleep over a prolonged period of time leads to apathetic and lethargic behavior. Loss of the slow-wave sleep was found in 75 per cent of the subjects and has been corroborated in other research projects.

**Psychotic Reactions** -- Dr. Tennant’s research involving US Army personnel in Europe showed that soldiers developed psychotic reactions after regular use of hashish. Some 500 were returned to the US for extended hospitalization. While the marijuana user experiences a feeling of euphoria, the following malfunctions and distortions of personality were observed by Dr. Lehmann: diminished drive, lessened ambition, decreased motivation, apathy, shortened attention span, distractibility, poor judgment, impairment of communication skills, less effectiveness, magical thinking, depersonalization, diminished capacity to carry out complex plans or to prepare realistically for the future, fragmentation in the flow of thought, habit deterioration, progressive loss of insight, and inability to feel comfortable.

**Illusions of Accomplishment** -- The heavy user also experiences illusions of accomplishment. It is difficult for him to look objectively at what is really happening to his or her personality and life. Dr. Lehmann said “It is only when the youngsters can be persuaded to remain totally drug free for a period of approximately three months that they can honestly review themselves, look at themselves, and see how far away from the objective, performing, functioning person they once were they have actually become.”

## DEFORMED OFFSPRING

**Accumulates in Sex Organs** -- Dr. Nahas, who has spent the past several years doing marijuana research, said the among its damaging effects is that the marijuana-produced chemicals accumulate in the testes and ovaries.

**Crosses Placenta** -- Marijuana crosses the placental membrane in humans. This means that, like heroin, marijuana can pass from the mother’s blood into the blood of her unborn child, who will receive essentially the same dose of THC as it’s mother.

**Chromosome Breakage** -- Tests at the University of Utah showed significant increases in chromosome breaks. Dr. Tennant’s research shows that there is a breakage in chromosomes in 60 per cent of marijuana users tested. Dr. Vincent Lynch of St. John’s University produced studies authorized by the National Institute of Mental Health, which indicate that the use of marijuana can cause human birth defects. In his research, pregnant rats and mice were given marijuana smoke equivalent to what a human would get in one marijuana cigarette a day for ten days. They produced offspring with serious genetic defects, as twenty per cent of the offspring were born with serious defects.

*Source: Texas Alcohol Narcotics Education, Inc., and the Arlington, Texas Police Department*