

MARIJUANA - NOT HARMLESS

Although the legality of marijuana use, possession, and sale varies from country to country, it is a commonly abused drug. In the U.S., a recent survey revealed that 37 percent of high school students had used marijuana at some point. The widespread use and easy availability of this very popular drug gives the impression that, despite continued warnings by drug prevention agencies, marijuana is an almost harmless source of recreation. A quick look at the hard facts will give you the opportunity to decide for yourself whether weed is worth the risk it poses to your body, mind and future.

SURROUNDED BY CONFUSION

There are many reasons why young people are confused about marijuana. Over-the-top prevention campaigns sometimes use scare tactics, making it sound like smoking pot will ruin your life immediately. On the other hand, popular culture frequently makes a joke of marijuana use and ridicules law enforcement.



Friends who use marijuana daily might seem perfectly normal, indicating that it isn't dangerous at all. Unfortunately, most of the drug's negative effects, while very real, are not visible at first.

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HOW DOES MARIJUANA WORK?

When marijuana is ingested it releases chemicals that travel to and alter certain areas of the brain. The main chemical in marijuana is Delta-9-Tetrahydrocannabinol or THC. THC binds to receptors in the brain effecting memory, thought, concentration, time and depth, and coordinated movement. Users may feel hot or cold, have muscle impairment and experience dramatically increased heart rates.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

As marijuana's chemicals enter the body and brain, they alter its functions for about three hours. During this period, the heart rate of the user increases greatly- up to double its normal rate. This abnormal increase is very dangerous, and research indicates that the risk of heart attack during marijuana use is up to four times as high as under normal conditions. The other common physical effects are reddened eyes, a dry mouth, the sensation of change in skin temperature, and relaxation of muscles. Mentally, users experience hallucinations and psychedelic effects, a false sense of calm, and a severe impairment of their ability to perform simple motor tasks. Attempting to do even simple things while under the influence of marijuana is dangerous, and users are often unable to perceive the danger because the drug lulls them into a false state of relaxation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To know more about the impact of marijuana on your health, go to:

Centers for Disease Control

cdc.gov/marijuana/health-effects

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

samhsa.gov/marijuana

in the know

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MARIJUANA

how it affects the body



LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Research into the long-term effects of marijuana use is incomplete. Scientists have found it difficult to measure exactly how the drug affects the body over the course of years, isolating it from other factors. The unquestioned long-term risk is addiction. About ten percent of marijuana users become addicted, and the more often a user takes marijuana, the more likely he is to get addicted— the rate can be as high as fifty percent for people who use it every day. For those who become dependent on marijuana, quitting brings its own set of physically draining withdrawal symptoms.



Everyone is familiar with the “smoker’s cough,” audible evidence that smoking causes irreparable damage to the throat, lungs, and airways. Marijuana smoke is even more destructive than tobacco smoke, and



serious health issues like bronchitis and asthma often follow those who smoke pot. As far as long term mental problems, studies on animals have indicated that marijuana’s active chemicals leave permanent damage behind in the brain. Researchers expect to find that memory and learning are negatively impacted for life by this damage.

MENTAL IMPAIRMENT

The effect of marijuana on the mind continues long after the high is over. Although medical professionals have suspected for many years that marijuana use takes a lasting toll on mental function, recent studies confirm their fears. A person who uses marijuana does not return to his normal mental capacity for at least a day and at most several weeks. For a student, this means that marijuana use translates directly into a serious learning handicap, hurting grades as well as any other mentally demanding activities such as sports, drama, music or debate.

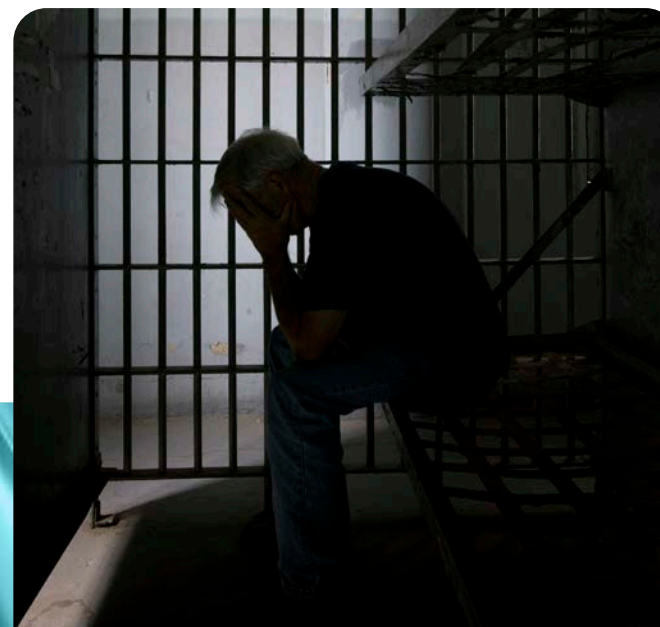
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MARIJUANA AND CANCER

Perhaps the most disturbing evidence of long term damage to the body by marijuana is a better understanding of cancer. We now know that one “joint” of marijuana contains as many carcinogens as five cigarettes, and the irritation to the airways and lungs also increases a user’s cancer risk dramatically.

OTHER EFFECTS

There are many effects of using marijuana that science is unable to put in a chart or percentage number. Inability to excel in school because of stunted mental function leads to failing grades, ejection from sports programs, and even dropping out of school altogether. Socially, users often find it difficult to relate to anyone other than marijuana users. Because marijuana can be detected in blood and urine samples long after use, getting and keeping a job is difficult for regular users.



Marijuana can lead to bad decisions that increase the chance of facing legal problems and jail time for activities done while under the influence.

Failing in so many areas of life quickly leads to depression, self-loathing, and even the danger of suicide, problems that are all very common among admitted marijuana users.

Ignoring the research and conclusions of science in favor of your own opinion is never a safe bet. The best way to eliminate the risks and effects associated with marijuana use is to avoid use altogether.

Your brain, body, and future depend on your decision to keep them safe from marijuana.