

10 questions to consider

before you smoke your next joint.

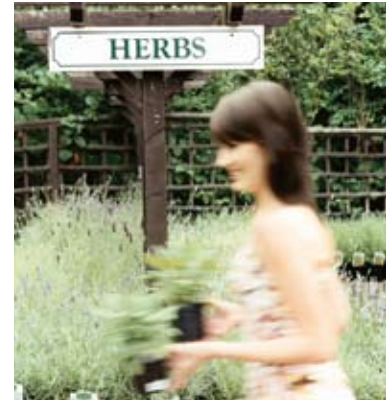


You've probably heard conflicting opinions about marijuana and its risks. The statistics and health information included here are not opinions. They are based on recent medical research done by universities and national health organizations. The debate will continue. Meanwhile, here is some information to think about.



#1 Marijuana is an herb, so it's safe, right?

NO. Just because marijuana comes from a plant doesn't mean it can't harm you. Marijuana (Cannabis) can contain over 400 chemicals, many of them added during processing. THC is the main mind-altering chemical and occurs naturally in the plant.



Because of the way marijuana is grown today, it can be 5 times stronger than in the 1970s. Stronger marijuana has stronger harmful effects.

Also the marijuana you use might be mixed with other drugs and chemicals like PCP, formaldehyde, codeine cough syrup or crack cocaine. ¹ This makes even occasional use risky.

MARIJUANA IS THE MOST COMMONLY USED ILLEGAL DRUG IN THE UNITED STATES. ²

#2 How Does Marijuana Use Affect Health?

HEART:

- Raises blood pressure
- Heart rate increases by 20 to 50 beats per minute
- In people with heart disease, the risk of heart attack is 4x greater within first hour

REGULAR USE:

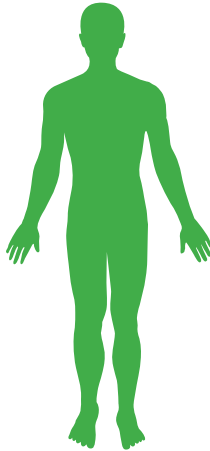
- Can cause weight gain and that adds stress to the heart

LUNGS:

- Can cause coughing
- Can lead to asthma attack for people with asthma
- Smoking with no filter, inhaling deeply and holding in marijuana smoke can result in a greater exposure to tar and respiratory irritants.³

REGULAR USE:

- Any inhaled smoke or burning material can damage airways and lungs.
- Can lead users to suffer from chronic cough, phlegm, lung infections, bronchial asthma and emphysema⁴ just like tobacco users.



SHORT-TERM MEMORY CAN BE AFFECTED UP TO 28 DAYS AFTER SMOKING MARIJUANA.⁵

SEXUAL FUNCTION

REGULAR USE:

- May lower testosterone levels causing mood swings, change in sex drive, low sperm production, or problems having an erection (ED)
- Linked to irregular periods and fertility problems⁶

BRAIN

- Impairs short-term memory
- Impairs judgment, which can lead to risky choices, like drinking and driving
- Affects coordination and balance, which can lead to falls or car crashes
- Changes sense of time, which can affect job performance, social plans, and family relations
- Alters perception and slows reaction time, affecting ability to drive or operate machinery

REGULAR USE:

- Impairs memory and may lead to problems with learning or remembering at work or school
- Long-term regular use may lead to an inability to focus or pay attention⁷



³Tashkin, D.P. Pulmonary complications of smoked substance abuse. West J Med 152:525–530, 1990. Referenced in NIDA Research Report. ⁴NIDA InfoFacts www.drugabuse.gov

⁵NIDA Notes www.drugabuse.gov ⁶www.acde.org/common/marijuana.html

⁷NIDA Research Report Series www.drugabuse.gov

#3 Didn't the new Massachusetts law make marijuana legal?

NO. It is not legal to sell or buy marijuana in Massachusetts. It is now a civil offense for adults to carry one ounce or less. Police may search you or your vehicle if they smell marijuana or suspect you have been using marijuana.

There is a \$100 fine for each violation, and the marijuana is seized as contraband. Those under 18 must also complete a drug awareness program within one year of the offense. If they don't, they may face an increased fine up to \$1000.

You can get more detailed information at www.lawlib.state.ma.us/subject/about/marijuana.html

REMEMBER: A REDUCTION IN THE PENALTY FOR CARRYING MARIJUANA DOES NOT REDUCE HARMFUL HEALTH EFFECTS. TOBACCO IS LEGAL – AND CAN HARM YOUR HEALTH.

#4 Is marijuana more harmful than cigarettes?

MAYBE. Research suggests that marijuana causes more harm than smoking tobacco. Independent scientific studies have found that one joint deposits 4 times as much tar in the lungs as one cigarette and that it's harder to quit smoking cigarettes when you smoke marijuana.⁸ Any burned substance can harm your nose, throat, airways and lungs when inhaled. So smoking even small amounts regularly over a number of years can cause damage.

**SMOKING 5 JOINTS
CAN BE LIKE SMOKING
A PACK OF
CIGARETTES.⁹**

⁸ Medical Research Institute of New Zealand
www.mrinz.ac.nz

⁹ NIDA InfoFacts www.drugabuse.gov

#5 Can you get cancer from smoking marijuana?

YES. Here's what researchers have found: When you smoke marijuana regularly, you weaken your body's ability to fight certain cancers. Marijuana doubles or triples the risk of getting some types of head and neck cancer.¹⁰ Lung cancer may also be linked to marijuana use since marijuana contains irritants and cancer causing agents.¹¹ New research shows that young adult men who smoke marijuana regularly may be at risk of developing an aggressive type of testicular cancer.¹²



MARIJUANA WAS ONE OF THE REASONS 290,563 PEOPLE IN THE U.S. VISITED THE ER IN 2008.¹³

¹⁰NIDA Research Report Series www.drugabuse.gov ¹¹NIDA InfoFacts www.drugabuse.gov

¹²Online Journal: *Cancer* <http://caonline.amcancersoc.org> ¹³www.samhsa.gov

#6 If you're pregnant and use marijuana, can it affect the baby?

YES. When you use marijuana, the baby is using it, too. THC from marijuana reaches the baby through your bloodstream. It passes through the placenta and umbilical cord and the growing baby gets less oxygen. Marijuana is linked to premature births.

Premature babies may:

- Be smaller and weigh less when they're born
- Be more likely to die in first month of life
- Have trouble breathing
- Have problems with memory and paying attention, which may eventually cause problems at home and at school

If you use marijuana and breast-feed your baby, THC can pass to your baby through your milk and may effect your baby's health.¹⁴



¹⁴Djulius J, Moretti M, Koren G. Marijuana use and breastfeeding. *Can Fam Physician*. 2005 March 10; 51(3): 349-350.

#7 Some doctors prescribe medical marijuana. Doesn't that prove it's not harmful?

NOT NECESSARILY. Many medicines, prescribed to fight disease, should not be taken by healthy people. Also, smoking anything can cause harm to mouth, nose and lungs. Still, according to NIDA Research Report, "THC, the main active ingredient in marijuana, produces effects that potentially can be useful for treating a variety of medical conditions."

The harms and benefits of medical marijuana use are still being debated; there is evidence to support both sides. Some individual states are deciding that some people with specific health problems may use it - with strict limits.



Medical marijuana is not legal in Massachusetts.

While legal in more than 15 states, its use is very restricted. Doctors in most states cannot prescribe medical marijuana because of its drug classification and pharmacies cannot sell marijuana in states where medical marijuana is legal. Doctors can only recommend its use for certain conditions, such as cancer, arthritis or chronic pain. Patients in states where medical marijuana is legal must apply for permission or register, verify that they have one of the conditions listed in their states' regulations, and often can only use marijuana in designated sites.

THE EFFECT OF EVEN A LOW DOSE OF MARIJUANA COMBINED WITH ALCOHOL IS GREATER THAN EITHER DRUG ALONE.¹⁵

¹⁵ NIDA Research Report Series www.drugabuse.gov

#8 Does marijuana have psychological effects?



SOMETIMES.

Some infrequent users experience panic, anxiety, even depression or thoughts of suicide. High doses of marijuana can cause hallucinations, delusions and the feeling of paranoia. Some regular marijuana users become depressed, lose motivation and say they are less satisfied with their lives.¹⁶ These feelings can lead to problems at work and at home.

¹⁶ NIDA Research Report Series
www.drugabuse.gov

#9 Is marijuana addictive?

IT CAN BE. The truth is that most people do not become addicted. But recent research shows that some heavy users, can show signs of addiction: the more they smoke marijuana, the more they need to get high. Regular marijuana users can become physically dependent on it. They may focus only on marijuana's positive aspects. They continue to use it no matter how negatively it affects their life, health, work, family and friends.

When they try to quit, they have real withdrawal symptoms like craving marijuana, trouble sleeping, anxiety or loss of appetite.

Most symptoms begin about one day after the last joint or blunt and may last for several weeks. The number of people seeking treatment to quit marijuana doubled in the 1990s and continues to rise each year.¹⁷



¹⁷ NIDA Research Report Series
www.drugabuse.gov

#10. What's available if I want help to quit using marijuana?



Group therapy or one-on-one counseling is available and includes learning about triggers and strategies to avoid using marijuana. 12 step programs, like Marijuana Anonymous, offer ongoing group support like NA & AA

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information & Education Helpline:

Telephone: 1-800-327-5050 TTY: 1-888-448-8321
www.helpline-online.com

Overdose/Needle Exchange information

1-800-383-2437

MA Tobacco Quitline

1-800-TRY-TO-STOP 1-800-879-8678

Marijuana Anonymous Meeting directory

“On Land and Online” meetings
www.marijuana-anonymous.org/meetings.shtml

AA Meetings

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/en_find_meeting.cfm

NA Meetings

<http://portaltools.na.org/portaltools/MeetingLoc>

Massachusetts Bureau of Substance Abuse Services

www.mass.gov/dph/bsas

Talk about Addiction

www.talkaboutaddiction.org

Massachusetts Clearinghouse

www.maclearinghouse.com

NIDA - National Institute on Drug Addiction

www.nida.nih.gov

Marijuana's effects on the brain

www.nida.nih.gov/researchreports/marijuana/Marijuana3.html

NIDA Infofacts: Marijuana

www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/marijuana.html

SAMHSA

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

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SA1090
APRIL 2010