

DRUG FACTS

With so many voices and opinions out there, all you need is the knowledge to make your own decisions.

CLASS NOTES ► MARIJUANA

THE LOWDOWN

It's a plant, so it's natural, and natural is always good—right? Think again, because both natural and synthetic versions of marijuana can cause a long-lasting, negative impact on your developing brain.

AKA:

Blunt, dope, ganja, grass, herb, joint, bud, Mary Jane, pot, reefer, green, trees, smoke, sinsemilla, skunk, weed, hash, tea, chronic, 420

WHAT IS IT:

A green and brown mix of dried flowers, stems, seeds and leaves from the hemp plant, *Cannabis sativa*.³⁹ The main active chemical is THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), which moves quickly through the bloodstream to the brain and other organs throughout the body.³⁹ Marijuana is a mild hallucinogen that can also act as a depressant or a stimulant.

THE RISKS:

You may hear people ask, "If it's dangerous, why do so many people have medical marijuana cards?"⁴⁰ It's true that scientists have determined that the cannabis plant has the potential for addressing a range of medical conditions. But it's also true that when you're young and your body is still growing, marijuana actually has the potential of inflicting a long-lasting, negative impact on your developing brain.⁴⁰

Using marijuana at a young age can result in structural and functional deficits of the brain. This could cause you to develop weakened verbal and communication skills, lowered learning capabilities and a shortened attention span.⁴⁰

LONG-TERM EFFECTS:

In addition to the possible effects on your brain, smoking marijuana may also be hazardous to your developing lungs. Marijuana smoke contains 50% to 70% more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke.⁴¹

You may have heard people argue that marijuana is a "gateway drug" to harder drug use. Some say this is a myth; others insist it is a fact. The truth is that there is a link. Research shows that the earlier you start using marijuana, the more likely you are to become dependent on it or other types of drugs later in life.⁴²

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Some movies and music make "stoner" culture seem cool, natural and like it's not a big deal. But if being fit and getting good grades are some of your goals, using marijuana can become a big deal, fast. Marijuana limits your brain's effectiveness, slows your thinking and impairs your coordination. A number of studies have also shown an association between chronic marijuana use and increased rates of anxiety, depression and schizophrenia.⁴¹

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PRESSURE METER

The pressure drops when you keep track of the facts.

Marijuana use is on the decline, with teen lifetime use dropping since 2000.⁴³

Marijuana affects memory, judgment and perception. Get high and you can forget things you just learned, watch your grade point average drop, or crash a car.⁴³

Marijuana smokers can have many of the same lung problems tobacco smokers have, like acute chest illnesses and an increased risk of lung infections.³⁹

Marijuana is the illegal drug most often identified in impaired drivers, fatally injured drivers and motor vehicle crash victims.⁴⁴

The short-term effects of marijuana use include memory loss, trouble with thinking, decrease in muscle strength, increased heart rate and anxiety.⁴⁵

Studies show that someone who smokes 5 joints a week may be taking in as many cancer-causing chemicals as someone who smokes 1 pack of cigarettes every day.⁴⁵

Marijuana contains more than 400 chemicals, including most of the harmful substances found in tobacco.⁴⁵

79% of 12th graders believe their friends would disapprove if they used marijuana regularly.¹⁶

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