



The Latest Research On Marijuana

By

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Many people think of marijuana as a harmless drug that should be legalized throughout the country. Others highlight the dangers of smoking pot and warn against the potential consequences of drug usage. Current research studies are beginning to provide useful insights into marijuana. This article provides a brief summary of some of the latest research findings.

Pot usage is on the rise.

It is clear that the legalization of pot in some states and the overall change in attitude toward pot usage is contributing to the rise in pot consumption. Research shows the following:

- Recreational cannabis use has now become almost as common as tobacco use among adolescents.
- 1 in 17 college students smoke weed daily or near daily.
- In Colorado, since pot was legalized, the number of fatal motor vehicle crashes where at least one driver tested positive for marijuana has increased. One study showed a jump from 4.5% to 10%.
- Potency of pot tested in Colorado is close to 30% THC (THC is the active ingredient in marijuana that gets you high). Three decades ago it was below 10%.

Risks Associated with Using Marijuana

- Driving while cannabis-intoxicated doubles the risk of a car crash. This risk increases substantially if users are also alcohol-intoxicated.
- Cannabis use during pregnancy slightly reduces the birth weight of the baby.
- Regular cannabis users double their risks of experiencing psychotic symptoms and disor-

ders especially if they have a personal or family history of psychotic disorders, and if they start using cannabis in their mid-teens. This rate is higher among males than females.

- Regular adolescent cannabis users have lower educational attainment than non-using peers.
- Daily users of cannabis before age 17 are over 60% less likely to complete high school or obtain a college degree compared to those who have never used the drug.
- A large meta-analysis study indicates that daily users of cannabis during adolescence are seven times more likely to attempt suicide, have an 18 times greater chance of cannabis dependence, and are 8 times as likely to use other illicit drugs in later life compared to those who have never used the drug. The same study further indicates delayed social and emotional maturation in chronic daily users.
- Boys go thru puberty earlier, but grow more slowly.
- Cannabis use suppresses the immune system of the body.
- One study found that pot usage may be linked with chromosomal aberrations, but more research is needed to verify this link.

What about Long Term Effects?

- Regular cannabis users can develop a dependence syndrome; the risks of which are around 10% of all cannabis users and about 1 in 6 if they start during adolescence.
- Researchers using multiple types of MRI techniques have comprehensively identified

existing abnormalities in both brain function and structure of long term marijuana users.

- Findings show smaller brain volume in the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), a part of the brain commonly associated with addiction, but also increased brain connectivity in the region; suggesting increased addictive responses to the cannabis stimuli.
- Cognitive tests show that chronic marijuana users had lower IQ compared to age and gender matched controls. People that begin smoking heavily as teenagers seem to be most at risk.
- Pot use during pregnancy is associated with abnormal brain structure in children. Those children who were prenatally exposed to cannabis had a thicker prefrontal cortex, a region of the brain involved in complex cognition, decision-making, and working memory.

Uncertainties of Cannabis Use is a lot like “Russian Roulette”

A review of the latest studies indicate that the social, psychological, neurological, chemical and physiological effects of cannabis use can vary from person to person. Many may use the drug occasionally and not display negative effects for years, if at all. While others may experience minor to severe reactions. There is clear evidence that those with a predisposition for mania, depression, psychosis, panic attacks, and mood swings are at greater risk if they use marijuana.

New Dimensions Can Help If You or Someone You Know Is:

- Depressed or Suicidal
- Dealing with trauma
- Struggling with Panic Attacks or Anxiety
- Having difficulty working or going to school
- Struggling with addictions or substance abuse
- Cutting or doing other self-destructive behaviors
- Struggling with anger
- Struggling to get medications stabilized

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Medical Marijuana

Early research of marijuana to treat medical conditions shows some areas of promise. Current research indicates that some of the chemicals within marijuana may help

- Diminish nausea in patients undergoing chemotherapy.
- Manage pain in patients with chronic neuropathy.
- Minimize weight loss in patients with HIV.
- Help suppress the immune system in patients with autoimmune disorders.
- Decrease the number of seizures in patients with severe Epilepsy.

It is important to note that some of the research studies indicate that it may be chemicals other than THC that may have the most medical benefits. More research is needed to understand the full costs and potential benefits of medical marijuana.



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Marijuana and Relationships

Family members or intimate relationships are often the first to point out issues associated with drug usage. While it is easy to dismiss their complaints as being “nagging” or “controlling”, it is useful to understand the experience that people close to you have when you are using marijuana or other substances. Some of the most common problems that intimate relationships complain about are:

1. Decreased communication - It is hard to hold an intimate conversation with someone who is high.
2. Emotional detachment - Family members, spouses, partners, and/or friends often complain that the person getting high becomes emotionally unavailable. It's like they are in a cloud of smoke. Their body is there, but they aren't really present. This often leads to hurt feelings which plays out in arguments over time.
3. Feels like their partner is having an affair - When partners begin to complain about the pot usage, the person using tends to become more secretive about their use. They frequently lie about how much they use, when they use or even if they used. Just like someone who is having an affair, they deny it, hide it, and yet find a way to make time for it. This often makes their spouse or family member feel “crazy”.
4. Too much time spent away from family - When you spend a lot of time getting high, preparing to get high, or recovering from the last high, relationships suffer.
5. Lack of help - Partners often complain about feeling like they are the only one taking responsibility for the chores around the house. They frequently feel like they are alone and complain about the lack of help that they receive.
6. Lack of motivation - Marijuana zaps motivation. As a result, many family members feel like they are always grieving the loss of the dream of what could be.
7. Lack of intimacy - It is hard to be in more than one intimate relationship at a time. If marijuana is your primary relationship, you sacrifice the closeness that can come in intimate relationships.

Marijuana and Your Mental Health

Weed can have a dramatic effect on your mental health. Advocates of cannabis use frequently talk about how pot can relax you and help you care less about your problems. While this may be true for some people, it is not true for everyone. Some experience an increase in anxiety when they get high and report feelings of being “out of control.” For most people, however, the biggest problem with weed is that it is too good at helping you “not care.”

Weed stays in the body for a long time

The active ingredients of marijuana are stored within the fat cells of the body. As a result, pot tends to stay in your system for a long time. In fact, THC can be detected in heavy users for months after they use. Because of this, pot begins to change the way that you think. The more chronic the use, the more it

tends to alter the thought process. Because this change in thinking tends to happen gradually over time, most people don't even notice the change. It's only after an extended period of abstinence do they tend to notice how much their thinking was altered.

Marijuana:

The Great Un-Motivator

Marijuana use can have a devastating effect on motivation. People that smoke pot often get “high” and talk about all of the things they want to do. In reality, however, they usually don't do anything, except go to the refrigerator and get something to eat. The more a person smokes pot, the greater their loss in interest in other activities. For example, teenagers that begin to use marijuana heavily tend to drop out of extra-curricular activities, such as

sports. They also tend to drop all of their friends that don't get high. Grades tend to drop and the frequency and intensity of conflicts at home tend to escalate. “I don't care” or “I just don't have any interest in it anymore” become frequent mantras of the heavy pot smoker.

Weed Diminishes Your Overall Performance

Even individuals that are high achievers or have enormous artistic talent experience this loss in motivation. They may still be achieving, but their achievements are below their potential. The greater the pot usage, the greater the loss in motivation and the greater the decrease in overall performance. However, because pot changes your thinking, you may not notice the drop in performance and if you do, you may “not care.”



Warning Signs of Addiction

As drug usage progresses, a person who is using tends to lie more and more.

- The first person that addicts tend to lie to are their parents or family members. (i.e. “I'm just going to a friend's house to watch a movie.”)
- As usage progresses, addicts tend to lie to their friends. (i.e. “I don't have any weed, do you?” - because I really only have a little left and if I share it with you I won't have enough for later.)
- Finally, addicts lie to themselves. (i.e. “I'm the same person I've always been. I can quit anytime I want.”) It is hard to be honest when you are using.