

Marijuana (grass, pot, weed) is the common name for a crude drug made from the plant Cannabis sativa. The main mind-altering ingredient in marijuana is THC (delta -9-tetrahydrocannabinol), but more than 400 other chemicals are in the plant. A marijuana "joint" (cigarette) is made from the dried particles of the plant. The amount of THC in the marijuana determines how strong its effects will be.

The type of plant, the weather, the soil, the time of harvest, and other factors determine the strength of marijuana. The strength of today's marijuana is as much as ten times greater than the marijuana used in the early 1970's. This more potent marijuana increases physical and mental effects and the possibility of health problems for the user.

Taking the resin from the leaves and flowers of the marijuana plant and pressing it into cakes or slabs make hashish, or hash. Hash is usually stronger than crude marijuana and may contain five to ten times as much THC. Hash oil may contain up to 50 percent THC. Pure THC is almost never available, except for research. Substances sold as THC on the street often turns out to be something else such as PCP.

DOES MARIJUANA AFFECT THE HUMAN REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM?

Use of marijuana during pregnancy may result in premature babies and in low birth weights. Men and women who use marijuana have shown that it may influence levels of some hormones relating to sexuality. Women may have irregular menstrual cycles, and both men and women may have a temporary loss of fertility. These findings suggest that marijuana may be especially harmful during adolescence, a period of rapid physical and sexual development.

HOW DOES MARIJUANA AFFECT THE LUNGS?

Marijuana can be especially harmful to the lungs because users often inhale the unfiltered smoke deeply and hold it in their lungs as long as possible. Therefore, the smoke is in contact with lung tissues for long periods of time, which irritates the lungs and damages the way they work. Marijuana smoke contains some of the same ingredients in tobacco smoke that can cause emphysema and cancer. In addition, many marijuana users also smoke cigarettes; the combined effect of smoking these two substances creates an increased health risk.

Fairhaven Police Department

Facts about Marijuana Use



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF SMOKING MARIJUANA?

A faster heartbeat and pulse rates. Bloodshot eyes, a dry mouth and throat. No scientific evidence indicates that marijuana improves hearing, eyesight, and skin sensitivity. Studies of marijuana's mental effects show that the drug can impair or reduce short-term memory, alter sense of time, and reduce ability to do things, which require concentration, swift reactions, and coordination, such as driving a car or operating machinery.

IS THERE ANY OTHER ADEVERSE REACTIONS TO MARIJUANA?

A common bad reaction to marijuana is the "acute panic anxiety reaction" People describe this reaction as an extreme fear of "losing control," which causes panic. The symptoms usually disappear in a few hours.

WHAT ABOUT PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDENCE ON MARIJUANA?

Long-term regular users of marijuana may become psychologically dependent. They may have a hard time limiting their use, they may need more of the drug to get the same effect; and they may develop problems with their jobs and personal relationships.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

The earlier people start using drugs, the more likely they are to go on to experiment with other drugs. When young people start using marijuana regularly, they often lose interest and are not motivated to do their schoolwork. The effects of marijuana can interfere with learning by impairing thinking, reading, comprehension, and verbal and mathematical skills. Research shows that students do not remember what they have learned when they are "high."

HOW ARE PEOPLE USUALLY INTRODUCED TO MARIJUANA?

Their peers introduce many young people to marijuana. (Usually acquaintances, friends, sisters, and brothers). People often try drugs such as marijuana because they feel pressured by peers to be part of the group. Children must be taught how to say no to peer pressure to try drugs. Parents can get involved by becoming informed about marijuana and by talking to their children about drug use.

HOW LONG DO CHEMICALS FROM MARIJUANA STAY IN THE BODY AFTER THE DRUG IS SMOKED?

When marijuana is smoked, most tissues and organs in the body absorb THC, its active ingredient; however, it is primarily found in fat tissues. The body, in its attempt to rid itself of the foreign chemical, chemically transforms the THC into metabolites. Urine tests can detect THC metabolites for up to a week after people have smoked marijuana.

