

Foundation for a drug free world report

WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana is the word used to describe the dried flowers, seeds and leaves of the Indian hemp plant. On the street, it is called by many other names, such as: [astro turf](#), [bhang](#), [dagga](#), [dope](#), [ganja](#), [grass](#), [hemp](#), [home grown](#), [J](#), [Mary Jane](#), [pot](#), [reefer](#), [roach](#), [Texas tea](#) and [weed](#).

Hashish is a related form of the drug, made from the resins of the Indian hemp plant. Also called chocolate, hash or shit, it is on average six times stronger than marijuana.

“Cannabis” describes any of the different drugs that come from Indian hemp, including marijuana and hashish.

Regardless of the name, this drug is a hallucinogen—a substance which distorts how the mind perceives the world you live in.

The chemical in cannabis that creates this distortion is known as “THC.” The amount of THC found in any given batch of marijuana may vary substantially, but overall, the percentage of THC has increased in recent years.

How is it used?

Marijuana is a mixture of dried-out leaves, stems, flowers and seeds of the hemp plant. It is usually green, brown or gray in color.

Hashish is tan, brown or black resin that is dried and pressed into bars, sticks or balls. When smoked, both marijuana and hashish give off a distinctive, sweet odor.

Marijuana is the most commonly used illegal drug in the world. A survey conducted in 2007 found that 14.4 million individuals in the US alone had smoked marijuana at least once during the previous month.

[Marijuana](#) is usually smoked as a cigarette (joint), but may also be smoked in a pipe. Less often, it is mixed with food and eaten or brewed as tea. Sometimes users open up cigars and remove the tobacco, replacing it with pot—called a “blunt.” Joints and blunts are sometimes laced with other, more powerful drugs, such as crack cocaine or PCP (phencyclidine, a powerful hallucinogen).

When a person smokes a joint, he usually feels its [effect](#) within minutes. The immediate sensations—increased heart rate, lessened coordination and balance, and a “dreamy,” unreal state of mind—peak within the first 30 minutes. These short-term effects usually wear off in two to three hours, but they could last longer, depending on how much the user takes, the potency of THC and the presence of other drugs added into the mix.

As the typical user inhales more smoke and holds it longer than he would with a cigarette, a joint creates a severe impact on one's lungs. Aside from the discomfort that goes with sore throats and chest colds, it has been found that consuming one joint gives as much exposure to cancer-producing chemicals as smoking five cigarettes.

The mental consequences of marijuana use are equally severe. Marijuana smokers have poorer memories and mental aptitude than do non-users.

Animals given marijuana by researchers have even suffered structural damage to the brain.

MARIJUANA—ITS BACKGROUND

The Indian hemp plant (from which cannabis drugs like marijuana and hashish are made) was grown for use as an hallucinogen more than 2,000 years ago.

Although cannabis contains over 400 different chemicals, the main ingredient which affects the mind is THC. The amount of THC in the hemp plant determines the strength of the drug. The weather, soil and other factors determine the percentage of THC found in the plant. By using modern farming techniques, hemp growers have developed strains of cannabis which have much higher levels of THC than in the past. THC levels averaged 1% in 1974 and 4% in 1994. In 2008, levels reached 9.6%, highest ever since analysis of the drug began in the 1970s.

One form of cannabis, called sinsemilla (Spanish for "without seeds"), may have THC levels from 7.5% to as much as 24%.

ALCOHOL VS. MARIJUANA

Is smoking a joint the same as drinking alcohol?

You decide. Here are the facts:

Alcohol consists of one substance only: ethanol. Marijuana contains more than 400 known chemicals, including the same cancer-causing substances found in tobacco smoke. Unlike cigarette smokers, [pot smokers](#) tend to inhale deeply and hold the smoke as long as possible to increase the effect of the drug, worsening the damage to the lungs.

Alcohol is eliminated from the body in a few hours, but THC stays in the body for weeks, possibly months, depending on the length and intensity of usage.

THC damages the immune system. Alcohol does not.

There is no intention here to minimize the dangers of [alcohol abuse](#), which can be equally harmful. Users, however, need to be aware that the chemicals in marijuana, some of them cancer-causing, remain in the body long after the drug is taken.

INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS

According to the United Nations, 158.8 million people around the world use marijuana—more than 3.8% of the planet's population.

- Over 94 million people in the US have admitted using it at least once.
- According to the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2.1 million people in the US abused marijuana for the first time that year.
- Among 12- to 17-year-olds, 6.7% were current marijuana users in 2007.
- According to US government estimates, domestic marijuana production has increased tenfold over the last twenty-five years: from 1,000 metric tons (2.2 million pounds) in 1981 to 10,000 metric tons (22 million pounds) in 2006. Not surprisingly, 58% of those aged 12 to 17 state that pot is easy to obtain. US marijuana users spent approximately \$10.5 billion on the drug in the year 2000.
- In 2005, 242,200 emergency room visits in the United States involved marijuana.
- According to the US Drug Enforcement Administration, a large percentage of those arrested for crimes test positive for marijuana. Nationwide, 40% of adult males tested positive at the time of their arrest.
- Of adults 26 or older who used marijuana before age 15, 62% went on to use [cocaine](#) at some point in their lives; 9% went on to use [heroin](#) at least once; and 54% made some [nonmedical use of mind-altering prescription drugs](#).
- Next to [alcohol](#), [marijuana](#) is the second most frequently found substance in the bodies of drivers involved in fatal automobile accidents.

THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA

Photo credits: Alamy

The immediate effects of taking marijuana include rapid heart beat, disorientation, lack of physical coordination, often followed by depression or sleepiness. Some users suffer panic attacks or anxiety.

But the problem does not end there. According to scientific studies, the active ingredient in cannabis, THC, remains in the body for weeks or longer.

Marijuana smoke contains 50% to 70% more cancer-causing substances than tobacco smoke. One major research study reported that a single cannabis joint could cause as much damage to the lungs as up to five regular cigarettes smoked one after another. Long-time joint smokers often suffer from bronchitis, an inflammation of the respiratory tract.

The drug can affect more than your physical health. Studies in Australia in 2008 linked years of heavy marijuana use to brain abnormalities. This is backed up by earlier research on the long-term effects of marijuana, which indicate changes in the brain similar to those caused by long-term abuse of other major drugs. And a number of studies have shown a connection between continued marijuana use and psychosis.

Marijuana changes the structure of sperm cells, deforming them. Thus even small amounts of marijuana can cause temporary sterility in men. Marijuana use can upset a woman's menstrual cycle.

Studies show that the mental functions of people who have smoked a lot of marijuana tend to be diminished. The THC in cannabis disrupts nerve cells in the brain affecting memory.

Cannabis is one of the few drugs which causes abnormal cell division which leads to severe hereditary defects. A pregnant woman who regularly [smokes marijuana or hashish](#) may give birth prematurely to an undersized, underweight baby. Over the last ten years, many children of marijuana users have been born with reduced initiative and lessened abilities to concentrate and pursue life goals. Studies also suggest that prenatal (before birth) use of the drug may result in birth defects, mental abnormalities and increased risk of leukemia¹ in children.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

- Sensory distortion
- Panic
- Anxiety
- Poor coordination of movement
- Lowered reaction time
- After an initial "up," the user feels sleepy or depressed
- Increased heartbeat (and risk of heart attack)

LONG-term effects of marijuana

- Reduced resistance to common illnesses (colds, bronchitis, etc.)
- Suppression of the immune system
- Growth disorders
- Increase of abnormally structured cells in the body
- Reduction of male sex hormones
- Rapid destruction of lung fibers and lesions (injuries) to the brain could be permanent
- Reduced sexual capacity
- Study difficulties: reduced ability to learn and retain information
- Apathy, drowsiness, lack of motivation
- Personality and mood changes
- Inability to understand things clearly

"I started using on a lark, a dare from a best friend who said that I was too chicken to smoke a joint and drink a quart of beer. I was fourteen at that time. After seven years of using and [drinking](#) I found myself at the end of the road with addiction. I was no longer using to feel euphoria, I was just using to feel some semblance of normality.

"Then I started having negative feelings about myself and my own abilities. I hated the paranoia.¹ I hated looking over my shoulder all the time. I really hated not trusting my friends. I became so paranoid that I successfully drove everyone away and found myself in the terrible

place no one wants to be in—I was alone. I'd wake up in the morning and start using and keep using throughout the day.” —Paul

ON THE ROAD TO DRUG ABUSE

Photo credits: Alamy

Because a tolerance builds up, marijuana can lead users to consume stronger drugs to achieve the same high. When the effects start to wear off, the person may turn to more potent drugs to rid himself of the unwanted conditions that caused him to take marijuana in the first place.

Marijuana itself does not lead the person to the other drugs; people take drugs to get rid of unwanted situations or feelings. The drug (marijuana) masks the problem for a time (while the user is high). **When the “high” fades, the problem, unwanted condition or situation returns more intensely than before. The user may then turn to stronger drugs since marijuana no longer “works.”**

The vast majority of cocaine users (99.9%) began by first using a “gateway drug” like marijuana, cigarettes or [alcohol](#). Of course, not everyone who smokes [marijuana and hashish](#) goes on to use harder drugs. Some never do. Others quit using marijuana altogether. But some do turn to harder drugs. One study found that youth (12 to 17 years old) who use marijuana are 85 times more likely to use cocaine than kids who do not use pot, and that 60% of the kids who smoke pot before the age of 15 move on to [cocaine](#).

Marijuana is sometimes combined with harder drugs. Joints are sometimes dipped in PCP, a powerful hallucinogen. PCP is a white powder, also available in liquid form, often used with cannabis. PCP is known for causing violent behavior and creating severe physical reactions including seizures, coma and even death.

“I was given my first joint in the playground of my school. I’m a [heroin addict](#) now, and I’ve just finished my eighth treatment for drug addiction.” —Christian

BEHIND THE SMOKE SCREEN

The use of marijuana is not only harmful to the [pot smoker](#) himself. He can also become a risk to society.

Research clearly shows that marijuana has the potential to cause problems in daily life. A study of 129 college students found that, among those who smoked the drug at least twenty-seven of the thirty days before being surveyed, critical skills related to attention, memory and learning were seriously diminished. A study of postal workers found that employees who tested positive for marijuana had 55% more accidents, 85% more injuries and a 75% increase in being absent from work.

In Australia, a study found that [cannabis intoxication](#) was responsible for 4.3% of driver fatalities.

It is almost impossible to grow up in America, or any country, and not be exposed to drugs. Peer pressure to do drugs is high and honest [information about the dangers of drugs](#) is not always available.

Many people will tell you marijuana is not dangerous. Consider who is telling you that. Are these the same people who are trying to sell you some pot?

Marijuana can harm a person's memory—and this impact can last for days or weeks after the immediate effects of the drug wear off. In one study, a group of heavy marijuana users were asked to recall words from a list. Their ability to correctly remember the words did not return to normal until as long as four weeks after they stopped smoking.

Students who use marijuana have lower grades and are less likely to get into college than nonsmokers. They simply do not have the same abilities to remember and organize information compared to those who do not use these substances.

*“The teacher in the school I went to would smoke three or four joints a day. He got lots of students to start smoking joints, me included. His dealer then pushed me to start using heroin, which I did without resisting. By that time, it was as if my conscience was already dead.” —
Veronique*

What Dealers Will Tell You

When teens were surveyed to find out why they started using drugs in the first place, 55% replied that it was due to pressure from their friends. They wanted to be cool and popular. Dealers know this.

They will approach you as a friend and offer to “help you out” with “something to bring you up.” The drug will “help you fit in” or “make you cool.”

Drug dealers, motivated by the profits they make, will say anything to get you to buy their drugs. They will tell you that “weed won't lead you to harder drugs.”

They don't care if the drugs ruin your life as long as they are getting paid. All they care about is money. Former dealers have admitted they saw their buyers as “pawns in a chess game.”