



Marijuana's scientific name is *Cannabis Sativa*. The growing marijuana plant normally has an odd number of leaves per stem, such as five, seven, or nine, and grows up to twenty feet high. Marijuana is the most frequently used illegal drug in the United States. Nearly 95 million Americans over the age of 12 have tried marijuana at least once.



Usually smoked as a cigarette or joint, in a pipe or bong, marijuana has appeared in "blunts" in recent years. These are cigars that have been emptied of tobacco and refilled with marijuana, sometimes in combination with another drug such as crack. Some users also mix marijuana into foods or use it to brew tea. When prepared as a more concentrated, resinous form it is called hashish and, as a sticky black liquid, hash oil. Marijuana smoke has a pungent and distinctive, usually sweet-and-sour odor. Street terms for marijuana include "pot," "herb," "weed," "grass," "Scooby Dooe," "ganja," and "buddah."

What is Marijuana?

Marijuana is a green, brown, or gray mixture of shredded leaves, stems, and flowers of the hemp plant. It grows wild in temperate and tropical climates.

Most wild marijuana is considered inferior to cultivated marijuana because of its low concentrations of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

THC is the mind-altering agent in marijuana and is concentrated in the flowering tops and upper leaves of the female plant. Cultivated marijuana contains ten times the THC of wild marijuana.

The marijuana plant contains over 400 chemicals. Many of these chemicals severely affect the user's health. The main mind-altering chemical in marijuana is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol). The potency of marijuana varies by the type and part of the plant used and whether it has been treated with other chemicals. Dealers treat marijuana with PCP, fentanyl nitrate, or embalming fluid to increase its potency. Doctored marijuana can be deadly.

ACCORDING TO SURVEYS, THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 2.6 MILLION NEW MARIJUANA USERS IN THE UNITED STATES EVERY YEAR.

- In 2002, over 14 million Americans used marijuana at least once in the month prior to being surveyed.
- 12.2 percent of the 14 million used marijuana on 300 or more days in the past year.

This translates into 3.1 million people using marijuana on a daily basis. The average age of first time marijuana use is under 14 years old.

Forty-two percent of parents who used marijuana as a teenager do not consider it a crisis when their own children use the drug. Consequently, this attitude has helped increase marijuana usage. One time usage among adults ages 18 to 25 increased from 5.1 percent in 1965 to 53.8 percent in 2002. Ironically, junior high adolescents are more influenced by their parents than

their peers. The rise in teenage marijuana use may be directly related to this casual attitude held by today's parents.

Research does not support the idea that marijuana is harmless. Studies indicated that marijuana usage leads to crime, drug dependence, and the use of other drugs. Marijuana is a gateway drug that can lead to severe health problems.

Psychological Effects

The psychoactive effects of marijuana vary widely, depending on dosage, the preparation and the type of plant used, method of use, and personality of the user. The most commonly reported side effect is a dreamy or sleepy feeling.

Long forgotten events are often recalled and thoughts occur in unrelated sequences. Perception of time is altered. Users experience visual and auditory hallucinations after taking large amounts of marijuana. Euphoria, excitement, and inner happiness—often with hilarity and laughter—are also typical side effects of marijuana use.

Some users may experience depression. While behavior is sometimes impulsive, violence or aggression is seldom induced unless the drug is mixed with another drug such as PCP. Short-term effects of marijuana use include problems with memory and learning, difficulty in thinking and problem solving, loss of coordination, and increased heart rate, anxiety, and panic attacks.

Marijuana and Learning

Depression, anxiety, and personality problems are linked with marijuana use. Since, marijuana hinders the ability to learn and retain information, the more a person uses the more they tend to fall behind in school, job, and social skills.



Marijuana users get lower grades and are less likely to graduate from high school, compared with non users. A study of 129 college students found that, for heavy users of marijuana, skills related to attention, memory, and learning were impaired even after they had not smoked marijuana for at least 24 hours. Researchers have also discovered that learned behaviors can also be damaged.

More recently, research showed that the ability of marijuana users to recall words from a list remained impaired for a week after quitting, but returned to normal within 4 weeks. Thus, some memory and learning abilities may be restored, even after long-term use.

Danger Lung Cancer!

Regular marijuana smokers have the same or more health problems than tobacco smokers. A study of 450 individuals showed that people who frequently smoke marijuana but do not smoke tobacco have more health problems and miss more days of work than nonsmokers. Many of the extra sick days were for respiratory illnesses.

Smoking marijuana increases the chance of developing cancer of the head or neck. A study comparing 173 cancer patients and 176 healthy individuals produced strong evidence that marijuana smoking doubled or tripled the risk of cancer.

Marijuana use also promotes lung cancer and cancer in other parts of the respiratory tract. Scientists have identified more than 150 chemicals in marijuana smoke and tar. Marijuana smoke contains cancer-causing benzopyrene, which occurs 70 percent more in marijuana smoke than in tobacco smoke.

Human lung tissue exposed to continuous marijuana smoke in laboratory testing show pre-cancerous cellular change. In other tests, the tars from marijuana smoke produced tumors. Scientists have learned that exposure to marijuana smoke interferes with the work of white blood cells in the lungs. White blood cells remove bacteria and other debris from lung tissue. When exposed to marijuana smoke, these cells cannot function. The amount of tar and carbon monoxide inhaled by marijuana smokers is three to five times greater than that of tobacco smokers.

