

MARIJUANA — EXTRA FACTS

Marijuana is the unprocessed, dried, and shredded leaves, flowers, stems, and seeds of the cannabis sativa plant (hemp plant). It's called by street names such as pot, herb, weed, grass or chronic; there are more than 200 slang terms for marijuana. The dried leaves are shredded and rolled with cigarette papers into a "joint". It is most often smoked using a pipe or "bong". Recently, it has appeared in cigars called "blunts."

All forms of marijuana are mind-altering. In other words, they change how the brain works. They all contain THC (delta-9-tetra-hydro-cannabinol), the main active chemical in marijuana. This substance is chemically unique among the common psychoactive drugs in that it is strongly fat-soluble. Because THC is strongly fat soluble, it is extremely slow acting. THC is a very potent drug, but its slow action makes it appear to be mild. As a consequence of its high fat solubility, THC is stored for many weeks in the fatty tissues of the body, which act like time-release capsules, steadily feeding THC into the blood.

Marijuana is classified as a *hallucinogen* as well as a depressant. Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug in the United States and tends to be the first illegal drug teens use.

Short-term Effects of Using Marijuana:

- ✓ Red, bloodshot eyes
- ✓ Increased heart rate
- ✓ Paranoia, hallucinations
- ✓ Loss of motor coordination
- ✓ Intense anxiety or panic attacks
- ✓ Distorted perception (sights, sounds, time, touch)
- ✓ Impairments in learning and memory, perception, and judgment
- ✓ Altered motivation and cognition, making the acquisition of new information difficult
- ✓ Difficulty in speaking and listening effectively, thinking, retaining knowledge, problem solving, and forming concepts

Marijuana blocks the messages going to your brain. Scientists are still learning about the many ways that marijuana affects the brain.

Marijuana By the Numbers

"Pot is natural, organic." "Nobody has ever died from a pot overdose." "Pot has medicinal qualities." These are arguments heard in favor of marijuana by its users, growers and sellers. So, can we assume that pot is harmless, or, even beneficial? Research up to this point has been incomplete. First, marijuana is not a simple drug to analyze. It is not a single molecule like other drugs. Additionally, with the potency increases in recent decades, long-term research is still inconclusive. Here are some of the numbers gathered from different studies to date:

- **2 years** = Maximum amount of time it can take for the body of a heavy user to completely rid itself of THC once entering recovery.
- **3 joints** = Number of joints per week defined as "heavy use" by the AMA. Because of the long half-life of mari-juana, the cumulative results of repeated use, and the addictive nature of marijuana, the AMA claims that 3 joints a week is considered "heavy usage."
- **3 x carbon monoxide** = mild marijuana contains 3 times the amount of carbon monoxide as a regular cigarette.

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- **4 x tar** = mild marijuana contains 4 times the amount of tar as a regular cigarette.
- **5%** = the highest percentage potency of marijuana used during the 1960s.
- **7 days** = the maximum half-life of just one marijuana joint. The half-life ranges from 72 hours to 7 days, which means, it can take your body up to 2 weeks to eliminate the chemicals of just one joint.
- **14 joints** = number of joints from 1960s that you would need to smoke to equal the potency of just 1 joint today.
- **40%** = the estimated percentage of potency of today's marijuana.
- **50%** = the amount the resting heart rate of the marijuana user increases as soon as the chemicals hit the bloodstream, causing increased blood pressure and increased risk of heart attack and stroke.
- **60 chemicals** = the number of chemicals created by the liver as it tries to breakdown THC.
- **61 chemicals** = the number of chemicals that occur exclusively in the cannabis plant.
- **400 x** = Affected brain cell walls in heavy users can be up to 400 times thicker than those of healthy, functioning brain cells.
- **421 chemicals** = the number of chemicals contained in marijuana, the most active ingredient being THC.

Sporadic use of marijuana can cause short-term memory loss, decreased ability to learn, decreased concentration, reduced reflexes and coordination. Users experience confused thinking and judgment. High doses can cause depression. All these symptoms can make it difficult studying for exams and learning any-thing at school.

Smoking marijuana causes respiratory diseases, such as lung cancer, emphysema and bronchitis. Marijuana also raises heart rates and increases blood pressure, which causes the likelihood of heart disease and stroke. THC suppresses the immune system by attaching to the walls of the white blood cells and diminishes their capacity to make antibodies to fight infection. Marijuana can stimulate the AIDS virus to become active in those infected with HIV in a dormant stage.

Marijuana is not a medicine. There are other non-mood altering drugs that are more effective on illnesses, such as glaucoma, that have significantly less health risks than marijuana. The most understandable argument for "medical" marijuana lies in end-stage cancer and AIDS patients who have exhausted their alternatives, and will probably not be affected by the long-term consequences of its use. According to a source on the police force, probably 99% of persons caught in possession of marijuana who claim it is for medicinal purposes, do NOT have a prescription from a doctor or hospital.

Amazingly, no research has proven that marijuana use actually kills brain cells, as is the case of other drug use, including alcohol. The reports indicate that THC only suppresses brain cells and a marijuana user in recovery will eventually regain the use of the affected brain cells. In the meantime, THC continues to build on the user's cell membranes, leading to **amotivational syndrome**. Users are unable to motivate themselves to achieve long-term goals. They lose their ability to postpone immediate gratification for a bigger and better reward later on.

Marijuana is a chemical affecting the central nervous system, causing behavior changes and often addiction. Looking at the numbers...basically, marijuana does a number on your brain, your body, and your life!

If you have questions about marijuana, alcohol, or any other drugs, contact the NCADA at 314/962-3456
For more information on marijuana, contact Marijuana Anonymous, 800-766-6779, or www.marijuana-anonymous.org
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