

MARIJUANA UPDATE

Marijuana is a dried mixture of the shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers of the hemp plant. It may be green, brown, or gray. Marijuana has many street names, including

- Pot
- Herb
- Grass
- Boom
- Mary Jane
- Gangster
- Chronic

Sinsemilla, hashish, and hash oil are stronger forms of marijuana. All forms are mind-altering; they change how the brain works.

The main active chemical in marijuana is **THC** (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol).

Although surveys show that there was a downward trend in the use of marijuana among teenagers from 1979 to 1992, that trend has reversed, with use of the drug increasing through the 1990s.

Effects of Marijuana on the Brain

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

- Problems with memory and learning
- Distorted perception
- Trouble with thinking and problem-solving
- Loss of coordination
- Increased heart rate; anxiety

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

- Cancer—Marijuana contains many of the same cancer-causing chemicals found in cigarettes.
- Drug “Priming”—Use of marijuana may increase the user’s vulnerability to addiction to other abusable drugs; “priming” the brain to be more easily changed by drugs in the future.
- Lungs—Daily use of one to three marijuana joints produces approximately the same amount of lung damage as smoking five times as many cigarettes. The way smokers inhale marijuana further increases the adverse physical effects.
- Heart Rate and Blood Pressure—Both marijuana and cocaine cause increased heart rate, and the effect is magnified when they are used together.
- Attention and Memory—Among heavy users of marijuana, impairment of attention, memory, and learning remain even 24 hours after the last use.
- Pregnancy—Studies indicate a link between marijuana and very early termination of pregnancy. It appears to interfere with the embryo’s ability to attach itself to the

uterine wall. Research also indicates that babies of marijuana smokers tend to be smaller, weigh less, and have smaller heads than those born to non-users. These babies are more likely to develop health problems, and they also have a higher incidence of nervous system problems.

- Failure to Confront Problems—Users believe that marijuana enhances their self-awareness, but studies indicate that it actually makes users more tolerant of problems, enabling them to avoid rather than confront and fix problems.
- Immune System—THC can damage the body's immune cells, leaving you more likely to get sick.

How Can You Tell If Someone Has Been Using Marijuana?

Someone who is high on marijuana may

- Seem dizzy or have trouble walking
- Seem giggly or silly for no reason
- Have very red, bloodshot eyes
- Have a hard time remembering something that just happened.

After a few hours, the user may get very sleepy.