



# Marijuana

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Our teacher St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians (5:18) exhorts us saying “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit”.

Among the effects of alcohol, marijuana and many other drugs of abuse, is to make the users have less control over their behavior which leads to a state of impaired judgment and hence bad decisions. On the other hand, one of the fruits of being filled with the Holy Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5:23), where you are always in control of all what you do.

In the words of Dr. Volkow, the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse “The use of marijuana can produce adverse physical, mental, emotional and behavioral changes, and, contrary to popular belief, it can be addictive. Marijuana smoke, like cigarette smoke, can harm the lungs. The use of marijuana can impair short term memory, verbal skills, and judgment and distort perception. It also may weaken the immune system and possibly increase the user’s likelihood of developing cancer. Finally, the increasing use of marijuana by very young teens may have a profoundly negative effect upon their development”

## What is marijuana?

Marijuana is one of the illicit drugs used in the USA and many other countries. The term “Marijuana” refers to the dried leaves, stems, seeds and flowers of the hemp plant Cannabis Sativa. Two other related materials are “Hashish” which refers to the more potent dried resin made from the hemp flowers, and “Hash oil” which is a very potent liquid extracted from the plant material. Marijuana is known by more than 200 slang terms on the street, such as pot, herb, reefer, weed, grass, boom, ganga, Mary Jane, mj, etc...

## What is the active substance in marijuana?

All forms of Marijuana contain the chemical substance THC (delta-9-tetrahydro-cannabinol) as the main active component. They also contain more than 400 other chemicals. The THC content of Marijuana available in the USA continues to increase dramatically since the 1970s.

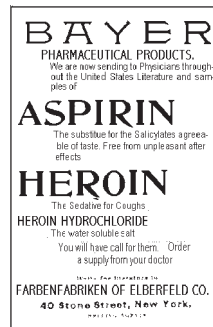
## Is marijuana a safe harmless substance?

As our knowledge of marijuana effects increases, through research, we now realize that marijuana use can be very harmful, as stated above in the quote from Dr. Volkow, the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse

Many dangerous drugs were initially thought to be harmless. But later, they were found to be very addictive and harmful. Two examples of such drugs are Cocaine and Heroin.



Cocaine was considered a harmless mild stimulant and was introduced in a drink that carried a name derived from the word Cocaine namely Coca Cola. In the 1880s Cocaine was also sold as “toothache drops” for 15 cents. But in 1903, cocaine was removed from the drink but it retained its original name “Coca Cola”. Cocaine now is considered one of the most addictive substances among the street drugs.



Heroin was introduced in the 1880s as a safe substitute for Morphine and Codeine. Later on, Heroin proved to be a very addictive dangerous substance.

Marijuana forms available in the 1970s contained very low THC, therefore research results obtained from marijuana research during that period of time do not reflect the effects of Marijuana available today that contain at least 5 to 10 times THC as compared to the forms that were available in the 1970s.



## What are the acute effects of marijuana?

Marijuana use is generally followed by experiencing pleasant sensations, colors and sounds seem more intense, and time appears to pass very slowly. Thinking becomes less logical. The users feel dizzy and may have trouble walking; they seem silly and giggly for no reason. They have a hard time remembering things that just happened. This is also accompanied by an increased appetite.

Physiologically, inhalation of marijuana can result in an increased heart rate, dilation of the bronchi. The blood vessels in the eyes expand, making the eyes look red, an observation that is very characteristic for marijuana users. In a minority of cases, individuals may experience anxiety and in very rare cases, psychotic attacks may develop.

## What are the long term effects of the use of marijuana?

Findings from some studies show that the regular use of marijuana may play a role in development of cancer and problems in the respiratory and immune systems.

1. Cancer: Marijuana smoke contains nearly four times as much tar and 50 percent more carcinogens than tobacco.
2. The association between tobacco smoking and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) has been firmly established. Marijuana smoking results in decreased pulmonary function, chronic cough, bronchitis, and decreased exercise tolerance.
3. Both animal and human studies have shown that marijuana impairs the ability of specific immune defense system cells in the lungs to fight off some infections.

## How does marijuana affect driving?

Marijuana has serious harmful effects on the skills required to drive safely: alertness, concentration, coordination, and reaction time. Marijuana use can make it difficult to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road.

Data have also shown that while smoking marijuana, people show the same lack of coordination on standard "drunk driver" tests as do people who have had too much to drink.

## Does marijuana affect the baby during pregnancy?

Babies born of women who abuse marijuana during pregnancy may be underweight at birth. Studies in children born to mothers who used marijuana have shown increased behavioral problems during infancy and preschool years.

In school, these children are more likely to have problems with decision making, memory, and the ability to remain attentive. THC is also excreted in the breast milk, and infants may become affected.

## How long does marijuana stay in the body?

THC and its metabolites are taken up by the fat tissue in the body. Generally, traces can be detected by standard urine testing methods for 2 to 6 days. However, in heavy, chronic users, it can be detected for several weeks after they have stopped the use of marijuana. It is also interesting to note that people who spend a considerable amount of time in an enclosed space with people using marijuana products may inhale enough secondary smoke to produce a false positive urine test.

## Does marijuana have valuable medicinal uses?

Many groups are calling for the legalization of marijuana because, in their opinion, it has many medicinal uses. But we have to note that there is a distinction between whole marijuana and pure THC. Whole marijuana contains hundreds of chemicals, many of them are harmful. Especially if smoked. Pure THC on the other hand can be taken orally as a pill. Although it has certain side effects, but they are much less than those of whole marijuana. Because of the concern about the effect of such a compound, THC has very limited approved uses that include its use in the treatment of nausea and vomiting resulting from cancer medications in terminally ill patients. The other approved use is improving the appetite of AIDS patients.

More research is needed to weigh the risk vs the benefits for the other proposed uses. It is important to note that for all these proposed uses there are more useful and safer alternative medications.

For **more detailed information** and for fact sheets on marijuana and other drugs you can consult the following web sites: [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov) and [www.health.org](http://www.health.org)

You can also contact The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) at 1-800-729-6686

## References

The information included in this article is based on the published reports and fact sheets of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) - [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

Submitted by a Mighty Arrow

