



Facts About **MARIJUANA**

#1 Marijuana is a Drug

Made from the dried and crushed leaves and flowers of the plant *Cannabis sativa*, marijuana is a combination of mind-altering ingredients called *cannabinoids*. The amount of THC, the chief active ingredient in marijuana, determines how strong its effects will be. Today's marijuana is as much as 10 times stronger than the marijuana used in the early 1970's.

#2 Marijuana Affects Brain Cells

Cannabinoids remain in the fat cells of the bodies of marijuana users. Since one-third of the brain is fat, cannabinoids are stored in the brain. Marijuana can hinder learning by impairing thinking, reading comprehension, verbal and math skills. It can impair or reduce short-term memory, alter sense of time, and reduce concentration. Breakdown products from THC have been detected in fat tissues for up to one month or more.

#3 Marijuana Weakens Your Immune System

Marijuana use reduces white cell production, which lowers the body's ability to fight infection and disease. Animal studies show that marijuana use may trigger repeated outbreaks of latent herpes infections.

#4 Marijuana Accumulates in Your Body

THC can remain in the tissues of the body for days or weeks, causing intoxication even when a person has not recently used the drug. Frequent users may never be rid of the drug, and the long-term health effects of this accumulation are unknown.

#5 Marijuana Harms Your Heart and Lungs

Marijuana smoke contains more cancer-causing agents than tobacco smoke. Researchers report marijuana cigarettes release five times as much carbon monoxide into the bloodstream and three times as much tar into the lungs of smokers as tobacco cigarettes. Marijuana speeds up the user's heart rate as much as 50%. It causes chest pains in people who have a poor blood supply to the heart.

#6 Marijuana Affects Reproduction

In females, changes in brain signals caused by THC may affect ovulation and decrease fertility. In males, even one marijuana cigarette can cause a temporary drop in male hormone production. Human and animal studies show that marijuana smoking can cause incomplete genetic information to be transmitted to offspring. The chemicals in marijuana can be toxic to an unborn baby, affecting its development and growth.

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MARIJUANA . . .

Affects the family . . .

When people becomes *dependent* on marijuana, they can become isolated from the rest of the family.

But the rest of the family becomes isolated too, when they try to avoid the fear, anger, suspicion, or guilt they feel about the dependence of the family member.

Out of love, and without knowing what they are doing, they may “enable” the user to continue in his or her dependence.

They may make excuses, change family plans, take over the user’s responsibilities, and, in general, keep the user from the consequences of his or her marijuana use.

Dependence on any drug is a “family disease”.

Affects school performance . . .

Frequent use of any drug during a time of rapid physical growth is a health concern.

Also, because marijuana affects reasoning and judgment, using this drug affects the student’s opportunity to learn, to feel, to develop relationships, and to discover who he or she is.

Students who use marijuana have

- Lower energy
- Lack of ambition
- Lack of interest in school activities
- Impaired short-term memory - kids may be labeled “slow learners”, when in fact their memory is affected by the drug.
- Low Achievement - frequent users tend to have lower grades than non-users.

Affects the workplace . . .

- Frequent absenteeism
- Erratic job performance
- Errors in judgment
- Inability to remember details
- Decline in job productivity
- Trouble in concentrating
- Inability to think clearly
- Inattention to safety rules
- Needless risks
- Slower reaction time
- Frequent accidents

Marijuana is a concern for everyone: in the family, in school, and on the job. People who are dependent on marijuana can get help. Family members, friends, and co-workers who care can provide support. Professional evaluation and treatment is often necessary.

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This fact sheet was produced cooperatively by the Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Council of Nebraska and by the Lincoln Council on Alcoholism & Drugs.