



## Tips for Teens: The Truth About Marijuana

**Slang--Weed, Pot, Grass, Reefer, Ganja, Mary Jane, Blunt, Joint, Roach, Nail**

### → Get the Facts...

**Marijuana affects your brain.** THC (the active ingredient in marijuana) affects damages the nerve cells in the part of the brain where memories are formed, making it hard to remember things.

**Marijuana affects your self-control.** Marijuana can seriously affect your sense of time and your ability to do things that require coordination-like driving. In 1998, nearly 77,000 people were admitted to emergency rooms suffering from marijuana-related problems. This was an increase of more than 373 percent since 1991.

**Marijuana affects your lungs.** There are more than 400 known chemicals in marijuana. A single joint contains four times as much cancer-causing tar as a filtered cigarette.

**Marijuana affects other aspects of your health.** Marijuana can limit your body's ability to fight off infection. It can increase your heart rate and lead to frequent chest colds. Some research even shows that long-term marijuana use can increase the risk of developing certain mental illnesses.

**Marijuana is not always what it seems.** Before it is sold, marijuana can be laced with other dangerous drugs without your knowledge. "Blunts"-hollowed-out cigars filled with marijuana-sometimes have substances such as crack cocaine, PCP, or embalming fluid added to them.

**Marijuana can be addictive.** As with alcohol and many other drugs, not everyone who uses marijuana becomes addicted, but some users do develop signs of dependence on the drug. They may experience such withdrawal symptoms as loss of appetite, sleep problems, weight loss, and shaky hands. In 1995, 165,000 people entered drug treatment programs to kick their marijuana habit.

### → Before You Risk It...

**Know the law.** It is illegal to buy or sell marijuana. In most states, holding even small amounts of marijuana can lead to fines or arrest.

**Get the facts.** There is NO proof that smoking marijuana is healthy and tons of evidence that it is not healthy. Smoking any substance--tobacco, marijuana, or crack cocaine--increases your risk of developing pneumonia and other illnesses.

**Stay informed.** It has not yet been proven that using marijuana leads to using other drugs. But, the fact is very few people use other drugs without first using marijuana. Teens who smoke marijuana are more likely to try other drugs, in part because they have more contact with people who use and sell them.

**Know the risks.** Using marijuana or other drugs increases your risk of injury from car crashes, falls, burns, drowning, and other accidents.

**Keep your edge.** Marijuana affects your judgment, drains your motivation, and can make you feel anxious.

**Look around you.** Most teens aren't smoking marijuana. According to a 1997 study, four out of five 12- to 17-year-old youth had never even tried marijuana.

## **Know the Signs...**

How can you tell if a friend is using marijuana? Sometimes it's tough to tell. But there are signs you can look for. If your friend has one or more of the following warning signs, he or she may be using marijuana:

- Seeming dizzy and having trouble walking
- Having red, bloodshot eyes
- Having a hard time remembering things that just happened
- Acting disinterested in school, family, or activities he or she used to enjoy
- Acting silly for no apparent reason

What can you do to help someone who is using marijuana or other drugs? Be a real friend. Encourage your friend to seek professional help. For information and referrals, call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at (800) 729-6686.

For footnote references, see our Web site at <http://www.health.org>.

## **Q&A**

**Q.** Isn't smoking marijuana less dangerous than smoking cigarettes?

**A.** No. It's even worse. One joint affects the lungs as much as four cigarettes.

**Q.** Can people become addicted to marijuana?

**A.** Yes. Research confirms you can become hooked on marijuana.

**Q.** Can marijuana help cure cancer?

**A.** No. Some people with cancer, HIV/AIDS, and other diseases claim to experience relief from pain and other symptoms that they attribute to marijuana use. However, scientific research has not yet confirmed these benefits and more research on this topic is being done. What is known is that smoking marijuana can cause lung damage.

## **Info**

To learn more about marijuana or obtain referrals to programs in your community, contact:

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information  
800-729-6686  
TDD 800-487-4889  
línea gratis en español 877-767-8432  
Web site: [www.health.org](http://www.health.org)

Curious about the TV ads of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign? Check out the Web site at <http://www.freevibe.com> or visit the Office of National Drug Control Policy Web site at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>.

The bottom line: If you know someone who smokes marijuana, urge him or her to get help. If you're smoking marijuana--stop! The longer you ignore the real facts, the more chances you take with your health and well-being.

It's never too late. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust.

Do it today!

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## Footnotes

1. Mid-Year 1998 Preliminary Emergency Department Data From The Drug Abuse Warning Network. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 1998.
2. Effects of Marijuana on the Lungs and Its Immune Defenses. University of California-Los Angeles School of Medicine Study, 1997.
3. IBID.
4. Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know (Revised). National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), 1998.
5. IBID.
6. Mueller, M.D. NIDA Notes, Vol. 12, No. 1. NIDA, Jan/Feb 1997.
7. 1997 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. SAMHSA, 1997.