

# Marijuana Addiction

## What is Marijuana?

Marijuana is the dried leaves and flowers of the hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa*). Like all plants, it is sensitive to the environment where it grows in. There are several factors that can affect the potency of this plant, such as weather and soil conditions that it grows in. It is these factors that affect the amounts of chemicals inside the plant. Therefore, marijuana grown in a place like Jamaica could be chemically stronger than marijuana from say, Japan or the United-States.

The chemical in marijuana that has a big impact on the brain is called THC, which stands for Tetrahydrocannabinol. Although the plant is known to contain over 400 other chemicals, this is the main active one. The marijuana plant is a green, brown, or gray mixture of dried, shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers of the hemp plant. On the plant itself, the buds or flowers are commonly known to contain higher levels of THC.

There are many slangs for marijuana, such as "pot", "weed", "buzz", "grass", "ganja", "mary jane", "chronic", and is known to have approximately 200 other names. Marijuana is usually smoked as a cigarette, called a "joint", a "nail" or "spliff", and is sometimes smoked in a pipe or a bong. Although less common, it is known to be consumed in cigar wrappers called "blunts", when it is often combined with another drug, such as crack or cocaine.

## The Brain's Response to Marijuana

One region of the brain that contains a lot of THC "receptors" is the hippocampus, THC alters the way in which information is processed by the hippocampus. When THC attaches to receptors in the hippocampus, it weakens short-term memory. The area also communicates with other brain regions that process new information into long-term memory. The hippocampus is a component of the brain's limbic system that is crucial for memory, and the integration of sensory experiences with emotions and motivations. Researches have shown that neurons in the information processing system of the hippocampus and the activity of the nerve fibers are suppressed by THC.

In addition, researchers have discovered that learned behaviors, which depend on the hippocampus, also deteriorate. Recent findings also indicate that long-term use of marijuana produces changes in the brain similar to those seen after long-term use of other major drugs. It can affect the parts of the brain that govern emotions and judgment. All these different changes are caused by the many chemicals, which counts for approximately 400 in the average marijuana plant. Additionally, these chemicals are known to increase when the plant is exposed to heat, such as when you smoke it.

When someone uses marijuana, these chemicals travel through the bloodstream and quickly attach to special places on the brain's nerve cells. These places are called receptors, because they receive information from other nerve cells and from chemicals. When a receptor receives information, it causes changes in the nerve cell.

The way the drug affects each person depends on many factors, including:

- user's previous experience with the drug;
- how strong the marijuana is (how much THC it has);
- what the user expects to happen;
- where the drug is used;
- how it is taken; and
- whether the user is drinking alcohol or using other drugs.

The various psychological and mental effects of Marijuana include:

- Difficulty keeping track of time, impaired or reduced short-term memory
- Reduced ability to perform tasks requiring concentration and coordination, such as driving a car
- Paranoia, hallucinations
- Impaired or reduced short-term memory
- Impaired or reduced comprehension
- Altered motivation and cognition, making the acquisition of new information difficult
- Psychological dependence
- Impairments in learning, memory, perception, and judgment - difficulty speaking, listening effectively, thinking, retaining knowledge, problem solving, and forming concepts
- Decreased social inhibitions

### The Physical Effects of Marijuana

Marijuana abuse is associated with many detrimental health effects. These effects can include frequent respiratory infections, increased heart rate and other serious physical symptoms. Studies also suggest marijuana causes physical dependence, with associated withdrawal symptoms.

A regular marijuana consumer may have many of the same respiratory problems that tobacco consumers might have, such as daily cough and phlegm production, more frequent acute chest illnesses, a heightened risk of lung infections, and a greater tendency toward obstructed airways. Cancer of the respiratory tract and lungs may also be promoted by marijuana smoke. Marijuana has the potential to promote cancer of the lungs and other parts of the respiratory tract because marijuana smoke contains 50 percent to 70 percent more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than does tobacco smoke.

Some short-term effects of using marijuana include:

- Sleepiness
- Increased heart rate

-  
Potential cardiac dangers for those with preexisting heart disease

- Bloodshot eyes
- Dry mouth and throat
- Enhanced cancer risk
- Decrease in testosterone levels and lower sperm counts for men
- Increase in testosterone levels for women and increased risk of infertility
- Diminished or extinguished sexual pleasure
- Damage or loss to the fetus during pregnancy.

Some long term affects found to be caused by marijuana consumption:

- Cancer.

It is known that marijuana contains some of the same, and sometimes even more, of the cancer-causing chemicals found in tobacco smoke. Studies show that someone who smokes five joints per day may be taking in as many cancer-causing chemicals as someone who smokes a full pack of cigarettes every day

- Lung and airway damage.

People who smoke marijuana often develop the same kinds of breathing problems that cigarette smokers have: coughing and wheezing. They tend to have more chest colds than nonusers. They are also at greater risk of getting lung infections like pneumonia.

- Immune system.

Animal studies have found that THC can damage the cells and tissues in the body that help protect against disease.

When the immune cells are weakened you are more likely to get sick.

## Signs of Marijuana Abuse

Here are a few behavior descriptions that could indicate someone might be consuming marijuana:

- Sleepy or stuporous in the later stages.
  
- Rapid, loud talking and bursts of laughter in early stages of intoxication.
- Lack of concentration and coordination.
- Forgetfulness in conversation.
- Inflammation in whites of eyes.
- Odor similar to burnt rope on clothing or breath.
  
- Distorted sense of time passage - tendency to overestimate time intervals.
- Craving for sweets.
- Increased appetite.
- Use or possession of paraphernalia including roach clip, packs of rolling papers, pipes or bongs.

## Solutions to Marijuana Addiction

When a person continuously drinks or uses drugs, his body becomes supersaturated with metabolites (the chemicals the body converts the drugs or alcohol into). These metabolites, although removed rapidly from most bodily tissues, may become trapped in the fatty tissues and remain there for years.

When he tries to quit, these drug or alcohol metabolites can be released back into the bloodstream. This can trigger drug or alcohol cravings which are almost impossible to resist. Presence of these metabolites in the blood, even in microscopic amounts, cause the brain to react as if the addict were withdrawing from the drug. Receptor sites in brain cells that have adapted to large amounts of the drug metabolite are now forced to deal with having only a small amount of the drug metabolite available. The brain "requests" the addict to give it more of the drug. This is called drug craving. The only way to end this is to take more drugs or drink more, and the cycle begins all over again.

Fortunately, there exists a a biophysical detox program to help get to the root of the problem. It is the Narconon drug rehab program.

This treatment addresses the biophysical and biochemical imbalances in the human body caused by a drug addiction and substance abuse. The biophysical program uses a unique sauna program that eliminates toxins from the body, hence eliminating the constant cravings reported by addicts. Once the sauna is completed, a social educational program teaches new life skills that enhance communication, perception, comprehension, etc., enabling the individual to tackle life's many hardships and come out on top. It also deals with the personality and traits of each individual to improve their behaviour and attitude.

Once the individual has thoroughly understood each aspect of the social educational program, he/she will now be able to apply these skills to repair the damage caused by their drug addiction and go on to lead a fulfilling life.

The final stage of the program is individually designed by the case supervisor, the staff member assigned to follow the individual throughout his drug rehab, so that he can specifically see what the individual has to work on to ensure a drug-free life.

The success rate for this program is very high compared to the others. It is a natural drug rehabilitation program, so there is no risk of becoming addicted to a medical drug that is sometimes administered in the detoxification process.

#### About the Author

This article was provided to you on behalf of Narconon.ca, a non-profit drug rehab & treatment organization dedicated to eliminating drug abuse and addiction through prevention, education and rehabilitation.