

10 Questions to Ask

Before You Use Marijuana



You've probably heard conflicting opinions about marijuana and its risks. The health information included here is based on recent studies done by researchers and national health organizations.¹

This booklet does not include information about medical marijuana. For more information please contact your doctor.

¹ See sources on page 12 for more details.

² Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol



#1 What is Marijuana?

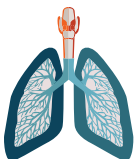
Marijuana is the name given to the dried leaves, flowers, stems, and seeds from the hemp plant, *Cannabis sativa*. Marijuana contains THC², a mind-altering chemical that occurs naturally in the plant and can be either smoked or eaten in food.

Like alcohol and tobacco, marijuana can have harmful side effects, especially when used in excess. It can also harm brain development.

The THC in marijuana can cause problems with balance, memory, and your sense of time and place. The amount of THC in marijuana has increased over time. THC may cause **newer users to become anxious or depressed**, and may also explain the **growing numbers of emergency department visits** related to marijuana use.

#2 How does marijuana use affect health?

We are still learning about the impact of marijuana use on health. We know more about smoking marijuana than other forms, and the following are some possible effects.



Lungs:³

- Smoking can irritate throat and lungs
- Smoking can cause coughing

Effects of regular marijuana use on your lungs:

- Can lead to chronic cough, phlegm
- Can lead to a greater risk of bronchitis



Heart:

- May raise blood pressure
- Can cause “head rush” when standing up — may lead to injuries from falls
- Raises heart rate after smoking and may increase the chance of heart attack

Effects of smoking marijuana regularly on your heart:

- May lead to heart disease



Brain:

Your brain continues developing until your mid-20s. Using marijuana before then can interfere with that development including:

- Impairs memory, learning, and attention
- Changes sense of time, which may affect job performance, social plans, and family relations
- Makes problem solving harder
- Changes the way things appear (perception) and slows reaction time, affecting ability to drive or operate machinery safely

Short-term **memory can be affected up to 24 hours after smoking** marijuana.

³ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23846283

#3 What about using marijuana and driving?

Marijuana slows reaction time and makes it harder to tell how far away things are and how long it might take to reach a point. Drivers under the influence of marijuana are twice as likely to have a car crash.

When you use both marijuana and alcohol there is even more risk of serious, even deadly, injury to you or your passengers.

Marijuana — in any form — should not be used before or while driving or operating any heavy machinery.

Drivers under the influence of marijuana **are twice as likely** to have a **car crash.**



#4 Is marijuana as harmful as cigarettes?

There is strong evidence of a **link between long-term marijuana** smoking and **breathing** problems. Smoking even small amounts regularly over a number of years can cause damage. What's more, recent studies show that people who regularly smoke marijuana are more likely to become tobacco smokers. This may cause even more harm.

Smoking marijuana doesn't just affect **your** health. Pregnant women, children, and pets breathe secondhand smoke. This may lead to trouble breathing or other health problems.

#5 Is it healthier if I use marijuana in food?

Not necessarily. Marijuana in food — also known as edible marijuana or edibles — goes through different organs: your esophagus, stomach, and intestines. We don't know yet how marijuana in food might affect those systems. Edible products can feel stronger than smoked marijuana, and the effects last longer.

Because edibles take longer to get into their systems, some people eat more to feel the effects. This can lead to very strong effects and cause immediate health problems. If you or someone else takes in too much at one time, you may need to get medical help.

Marijuana in food can be a safety risk for others. **Keep all kinds of marijuana — especially edibles — in sturdy, locked containers** away from children and pets.

#6 If I'm pregnant and use marijuana, can it affect my baby?⁴

Yes. When you use marijuana, THC from marijuana reaches the baby through your blood. It passes through the placenta and umbilical cord, and the growing baby may get less oxygen. Marijuana may affect certain developing parts of the baby's brain. It is also linked to premature births. Premature babies may be smaller and weigh less at birth which can cause health problems.

If you use marijuana and breast-feed your baby, THC can pass to your baby through your milk and may affect your baby's health and growth.

Just like with cigarettes, babies and children should be protected from secondhand marijuana smoke.



⁴ www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/can-marijuana-use-during-pregnancy-harm-baby

#7 Is “synthetic marijuana” the same as marijuana that comes from a plant?⁵

No, and it has serious health effects. “Synthetic marijuana,” also known as K2 and Spice, is not marijuana at all. It is a range of products made with man-made cannabinoids (chemicals that act like THC and trigger a similar response in the brain). These chemicals are sprayed on dried, shredded leaves, herbs, and spices so they can be smoked, or put in liquid to be vaporized and inhaled.

A range of chemicals are in different products, so it is hard to know what the effects will be. These chemicals act on the same parts of the brain as THC and affect the brain in some of the same ways. The very powerful chemicals in synthetic marijuana can trigger stronger, more severe reactions such as mental breaks (psychoses), leading to emergency room visits—and even death. Other side effects that have been reported from the use of synthetic marijuana include increased heart rate, breathing problems, acute kidney injury, vomiting, and violent or suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

⁵ www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/synthetic-cannabinoids;
www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6527a2.htm

#8 Does marijuana have psychological effects?

Sometimes. Some people who use marijuana experience panic, fear, and even depression or thoughts of suicide. High doses of marijuana can cause hallucinations, delusions, and the feeling of paranoia. Some regular marijuana users become depressed, lose motivation, and say they are less satisfied with their lives. These feelings can lead to problems at work and at home.

The effect of even a **low dose** of marijuana **combined** with alcohol **is greater** than either drug alone.



#9 Is marijuana addictive?

Though marijuana in any form has mind altering effects, most people do not become addicted. Research shows that some heavy users can show signs of dependence—the more often they use marijuana, the more they need it. Regular marijuana users can become physically dependent. They may continue to use even when it causes problems with their life, health, work, family, and friends. When they try to quit, they have real withdrawal symptoms like cravings, trouble sleeping, anxiety, or loss of appetite.

People who use marijuana in any form and have become physically dependent will notice some or all of these symptoms. Most symptoms begin about one day after someone has stopped smoking marijuana and may last for several weeks. At this time, there is less information about how long it takes for symptoms

to begin after stopping use of edibles or how long these symptoms might last.

The number of people looking for treatment to quit marijuana continues to rise each year.



#10 What's available if I want help to quit using marijuana?

One-on-one counseling or group therapy is available and includes learning about triggers and strategies to avoid using marijuana. 12-step programs, like Marijuana Anonymous (MA), offer ongoing group support like Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). You can find more information and services at the Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline website at HelplineMA.org or by telephone at toll-free 1-800-327-5050. Or use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370, 7 days a week.

Information from this booklet is from the following sources:

- www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana
- www.cdc.gov/marijuana
- Hall W. What has research over the past two decades revealed about the adverse health effects of recreational cannabis use? *Addiction* 2014
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017. *The health effects of cannabis and cannabinoids: The current state of evidence and recommendations for research*. Washington DC: National Academies Press. Doi:10.17226/24625.
- Volkow ND, et al. Adverse Health Effects of Marijuana Use. *NEJM* 2014;370, 2219-2227.

For help:

Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline:

Information about prevention and treatment programs.

Toll-free: 1-800-327-5050 (7 days a week; multi-lingual)

TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370

HelplineMA.org

Overdose Prevention and Naloxone Access

mass.gov/overdose-prevention-and-naloxone-access

Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention

Information and hotline addressing overdoses, inhalants,

and other poisons. Toll-free: 1-800-222-1222 (24 hours)

TTY: 1-888-244-5313 | www.maripoisoncenter.com. In

immediate danger, call 911 or your local emergency number.

Self-Help Groups:

12-Step programs to support recovery with in-person, online, and telephone meetings:

Marijuana Anonymous (MA)

www.marijuana-anonymous.org

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Eastern Massachusetts: 1-617-426-9444 | www.aaemass.org

Western Massachusetts: 1-413-532-2111 | www.westernmassaa.org

Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

Toll-free: 1-866-NA HELP U or 1-866-624-3578 | www.nerna.org

Smart Recovery

www.smartrecovery.org

Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline

Advice and resources for trying to stop smoking.

Toll-free: 1-800-QUITNOW or 1-800-784-8669 (English)

Toll-free: 1-800-8-Déjalo or 1-800-833-5256 (Spanish)

Toll-free: 1-800-784-8669 (other languages) | TTY: 1-800-833-1477

www.makesmokinghistory.org/quit-now

Additional resources

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services

Information, statistics, resources, and services related to alcohol.

mass.gov/dph/bsas

Opioid Overdose Prevention

mass.gov/dph/overdose

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse

Free publications and DVDs on many health topics, including alcohol and drug misuse. Toll-free: 1-800-952-6637

TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-720-3480

mass.gov/MAClearinghouse

National Institute on Drug Addiction (NIDA)

www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana



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