



Basic Information on Marijuana Use

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Getting High

Usually, when marijuana is taken into the body, a mental state that most users find pleasant slowly emerges. There is some confusion, especially about time, which may be disturbing. When asked why people use marijuana, they typically answer, "Because of the feeling." Many people find marijuana use simply feels good. It is also important to note many people dislike these often subtle feelings of intoxication and will try marijuana only once. Interestingly, many people who try marijuana don't notice any change in perception until someone explains to them how to identify an often mild sensation of intoxication.

The exact reaction to marijuana depends on the person, the setting, and especially the dose (the amount of the drug's psychoactive ingredients inhaled or ingested). Because of its unregulated nature in states where use is illegal, the amount of marijuana used does not necessarily correlate with the level of intoxication. Even in some states where use is legal, the dosage or potency unfortunately is not clearly communicated to purchasers.

First-time users sometimes notice nothing more than a cough and perhaps a mild headache. Other times the experience can go terribly wrong. Fear or panic can occur, even among longtime users, depending upon their state of mind, the environment surrounding them, the "strength" or potency of the drug, and how much is used within a given timeframe.

The marijuana plant, or "natural cannabis" (*Cannabis sativa* and *indica*), is packaged for use in several ways. While each form of use differs in potency, all have similar impacts.

The Marijuana Plant - a leafy plant material that contains variable amounts of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), a chemical that triggers intoxication. There are two general categories of the marijuana plant. The first is marijuana sativa which is typically identified as "hemp." This is the strain often used for rope, cloth and other industrial compounds. The second type which has a higher potency of intoxicating properties is typically marijuana indica. Some marijuana is batched with marijuana plant resin, giving higher THC content and consequent enhanced intoxication. Broken-up leaves can be eaten, the psychoactive ingredient leached out and drunk as tea, or, most commonly, rolled or tapped into a cigarette, pipe, or cigar, and inhaled. When marijuana is ingested through eating or drinking, it enters the body through the digestive process and intoxication does not occur for a period of time; the user also remains in a state of intoxication for a longer period of time. When marijuana is smoked and inhaled it enters the body quickly and effects may be noticed in a matter



of minutes. While traces remain in the body for a considerable period of time, the period of detectable intoxication is usually relatively short. Although it depends on dosage, inhaling marijuana will typically create intoxication for an hour or a bit longer, and when ingested, for several hours. Because marijuana is lipid-soluble it is absorbed by fat tissue and its presence can be detected for days or in some cases weeks.

Hashish - a crystallized plant resin with typically much higher levels of THC.

Hash Oil - the resin processed into a liquid extremely high in THC content.

Medical Marijuana - Marijuana, or a marijuana-like compound containing THC or synthetic THC, is sometimes prescribed by physicians to mitigate nausea, increase appetite, especially in patients receiving chemotherapy, or for several other medical conditions. In states where medical marijuana is lawful, marijuana compounds are prescribed for ingestion and, in only a few cases, for inhalation.

Recreational Synthetic Marijuana - chemicals containing compounds similar to the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, but different enough to not technically be considered a “controlled substance” under existing criminal codes. A fast-moving paradigm between synthetic marijuana producers and government regulators has created the consistently shifting production of “marijuana-like” drugs, typically sold in drug paraphernalia shops or over the internet.

The internet contains ads promoting supposedly “legal” marijuana for personal use. Since the chemical constituents are consistently changing, getting a reasonable fix on the characteristics of risk is impossible. Some mail-order synthetic marijuana has caused serious health problems. Recent model state legislation, based on changes in federal scheduling of drugs, has been adopted in many states and, due to public health warnings and legalization in some areas, the use of synthetic marijuana is declining.

Wax Marijuana - The most recent variation of marijuana-based compounds is termed, “wax.” It is manufactured through a potentially dangerous process involving heating marijuana with a butane torch, usually in a sealed metal tube. Through heat and pressure, the resulting residue is essentially “distilled.” Beyond the risky manufacturing process, which can involve fire or explosion, dosage of the psychoactive ingredient THC is often both high and variable. Its use has resulted in a number of emergency room admissions, typically for panic.

Cannabidiol or CBD - Cannabidiol is one of the many constituents of cannabis or marijuana. It can be extracted from the hemp plant with all but trace amounts of the THC removed. It is used for topical creams, cosmetics, and medicinally. There are a number of homeopathic anecdotal claims that it can reduce pain, increase awareness, relieve anxiety, and prevent certain disease-based discomforts.



Since CBD does not contain substantial burdens of intoxicating properties, it is lawfully sold over the counter and through the internet. Adulterated or alleged CBD appears to have been the cause of a rash of illnesses, especially in Europe.

Vaping - Tobacco corporations have refined the technology for converting tobacco (nicotine) or marijuana (THC) through the use of a small cassette containing tobacco or marijuana which creates an aerosol or mist. This can be inhaled through what is termed a “vaping pipe.” These small, stylish pipes use a battery to create heat without fire and smoke. The result is a cool vapor that can be inhaled. Essentially, a lipid or oil is batched in with the plant matter, then heated, creating a vapor which is inhaled without the discomfort or lung damage from hot smoke. The identifiable odor of burning plant matter is avoided. This masks the use of marijuana.

There have been significant concerns involving life-threatening hospitalizations and deaths attributed to the illicit production of marijuana cartridges. Manufacturers have used lipids or oils that become toxic to lung tissue when heated and inhaled along with the marijuana. Vaping illicit marijuana is dangerous.

Ingestion - The issue of ingestion, as opposed to inhalation, is serious. Just as vitamins with sweeteners in the shape of cartoon characters endangered children, the many new candies and bakery products containing doses of ingestible marijuana present a poison control risk. Child sensitive label warnings are critical. Dose information is especially important for ingestible marijuana. The level of intake is much more difficult to estimate when the drug is ingested.

