



# Marijuana

Marijuana, Grass, Herb, Mary Jane, Pot, Reefer, Skunk, Weed, Boom, Bud, Chronic, Gangster, Ganja, Kif, MJ, whatever you call it, most students think it stinks. Although media images may try to convince us that "everyone" is doing it, when anonymously surveyed, it turns out, most don't. According to the latest Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) report, 4 out of 5 young people surveyed didn't use marijuana in the last month.

## WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana is the dried green and brown mix of dried flowers, stems, seeds and leaves from the Cannabis sativa or Cannabis indica plant. Extracts from it include hash oil, shatter, wax, and budder. It can be smoked, vaped, or added to food to make 'edibles'.

Of the more than 500 chemicals in marijuana, the main active chemical is THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), which moves quickly through the bloodstream to the brain and other organs throughout the body.

## WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT IT? THE FACTS ARE...

### Strength and Potency

The amount of THC in marijuana has increased over the past decades. In the early 1990s, the average THC content in marijuana plants was about 3.74%. In 2013, it was almost 10%, and extracts or resins can have 30-50% more THC than plants. Smoking or vaping it can deliver dangerous amounts of THC and has led some users to the emergency room and death.

### Short-Term Effects

Short term, when marijuana is smoked or vaporized, THC quickly passes from the lungs into the bloodstream, which carries it to organs throughout the body, including the brain. As it enters the brain, THC attaches to cells, or neurons with cannabinoid receptors. Ordinarily, these cannabinoid receptors are activated by brain chemicals that are part of a neural communication system and play an important role in brain development and function. But marijuana over-activates this system, causing impaired coordination, difficulty with thinking, judgment and problem solving, distorted reality, as well as disrupted learning and memory. Its effects begin almost immediately and its effects on attention, memory, and learning can last for days or weeks with youth. Marijuana causes poor judgment that can lead to risky behavior, such as choosing to drive impaired. High school seniors

who smoke marijuana are 2 times more likely to receive a traffic ticket and 65% more likely to get into an accident than those who don't smoke. Finally, in Florida smoking marijuana can result in fines or prison time, with the vaping of THC being a 2nd degree felony.

### Long-Term Effects

Our brain goes through significant development during the teen and young adult years and does not fully mature until the age of 25. With regular use (daily or nearly daily), the alterations to the brain caused by marijuana can lead to lowered learning capabilities, a shortened attention span, weakened verbal communication skills, a lowered IQ, and an inability to perceive any negative impact from marijuana use. Teens who smoke marijuana daily are 60% less likely to graduate from high school or college than those who never use. A study concluded marijuana had a more damaging effect on teenagers' long-term cognitive abilities than alcohol. Even after students reported stopping marijuana, their cognition did not improve.

*Marijuana contains 50-70% more cancer-causing substances than tobacco smoke.*

*People who begin using marijuana before 18 are 4-7 times more likely than adults to develop a use disorder.*

Research suggests that people who use marijuana regularly for a long time are less satisfied with their lives and have more problems with friends and family compared to people who do not use marijuana. There is also an association between regular and prolonged marijuana use and mental illness, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts among adolescents. Those who smoke daily are 7 times more likely to attempt suicide. In addition to the possible effects on cognitive and emotional development, frequently smoking marijuana can cause the same respiratory problems as tobacco use. Smoking 5 joints a day can be as harmful to your body as 20 cigarettes a day because of the tar it deposits in the lungs. It contains 50-70% more cancer-causing substances than tobacco smoke.

With all these negative effects, why would people continue to use? Marijuana, like any other drug, is addictive and the likelihood of addiction increases considerably for those who start young. Approximately 10% of users may develop Cannabis Use Disorder and may continue to use despite it causing problems with their health, school, friendships, or family. People who begin using marijuana before the age of 18 are 4–7 times more likely than adults to develop a use disorder.

## WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

### Students

To prevent the potential problems caused by marijuana use, know how you will turn down the offer before it comes. Create a one-liner you can feel comfortable saying to a friend, such as “no thanks, not my thing” and suggest an alternate healthy activity or leave the area.

If you're smoking marijuana - stop. The longer you ignore the facts and its effects, the more chances you take with your health and well-being. Find a healthy replacement behavior and how to live above the influence of negative ones at [abovetheinfluence.com](http://abovetheinfluence.com). Although initially using may seem to make a problem smaller, it only postpones the problem and creates many more. If you need help in stopping, talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust or call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662- HELP (4357). This helpline can also be used to help a friend seeking professional help for their marijuana or other drug use.

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### Parents

Stay informed. Know the risks and don't minimize the potential damage caused by use. If your child has one or more of the following warning signs, he or she may be using:

- seeming dizzy and having trouble walking
- having red, bloodshot eyes and smelly hair and clothes
- having a hard time remembering things that just happened
- acting silly for no apparent reason.

You are the most important influence in your child's life. Find more information at The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids at [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org) (look for the Marijuana Talk Kit) or call the Parents Toll-Free Helpline 1-855-DRUGFREE. Additional resources can be found at the National Family Partnership ([nfp.org](http://nfp.org)), the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH)'s site just for parents ([drugabuse.gov](http://drugabuse.gov)), or the United Way of Broward County Commission on Behavioral Health and Drug Prevention's Marijuana Prevention Toolkit ([drugfreebroward.org](http://drugfreebroward.org)).

For a local professional who specializes in addiction, dial 211 to reach Broward's 211 First Call for Help information and referral hotline.

### Teachers

Help your students learn healthy ways to cope with difficult feelings other than turning to drugs. Use Broward County's Above the Influence Toolkit ([browardschools.com/ati](http://browardschools.com/ati)) or go to the national Above the Influence website ([abovetheinfluence.com](http://abovetheinfluence.com)). Additional curriculum and resources can be found in the School Climate & Discipline Department Resources SharePoint or [HealthTeacher.com](http://HealthTeacher.com).

**For more information, links and resources go to [BrowardPrevention.org](http://BrowardPrevention.org).**