

## GETTING STUPID

### Marijuana, Your Brain and Your Body

When you smoke weed, large amounts of THC (that's the active ingredient in marijuana) travel to your brain and mess with receptors and nerve cells. That mellow, relaxed feeling that marijuana users experience, is actually just their brains slowing down.

THC also affects the parts of your brain that control things like your memory, your concentration and your coordination. Want to know the worst part? The younger you are when you start smoking weed, the more damage you'll do to your brain. Young pot smokers are hurting their ability to learn new things and retain information.

Bottom line: Weed can make you dumb. It can also cause other unhealthy side effects, including:

- Increased heart rate
- Lung and respiratory problems
- Feelings of anxiety or paranoia
- Coughing
- Weight gain (due to increased appetite, known as "the munchies")



Weed can also put you at risk for developing cancer: Pot smoke isn't any safer than cigarette smoke – in fact, it contains many of the same cancer-causing chemicals as tobacco. Marijuana even contains more tar and carbon monoxide than you'd find in a regular cigarette.

Pot smokers get hooked on the relaxed, chilled-out feeling they get when they smoke. Eventually, many of them start smoking more and more pot, or looking for other ways to get high.

## SAYING "NO" TO GATEWAY DRUGS

You know the risks of using gateway drugs like alcohol, tobacco and marijuana, but what do you say when someone offers you a beer, a cigarette, or a joint at a party? You can always say "no" and walk away, or you can try one of these lines:

- "No thanks. I don't smoke/drink."
- "No way – baseball season is coming up and I want to be in shape."
- "If my parents find out, they'll ground me until college."

## TEST YOURSELF

Think you're an expert on gateway drugs? Take this quiz and find out!

1. Heroin is NOT considered a "gateway drug"?  
a. True                      b. False
2. Smokeless tobacco, like chew or snus, is safer than smoking cigarettes.  
a. True                      b. False
3. Using marijuana can cause you to gain weight, but that's the only negative effect.  
a. True                      b. False
4. Alcohol is a depressant that messes with your brain's ability to send messages to your body.  
a. True                      b. False
5. Alcohol abuse can damage the parts of your brain that control memory, sleep and decision-making.  
a. True                      b. False

Answers: 1. a; 2. b; 3. b; 4. a; 5. a

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# GATEWAY DRUGS

**TOBACCO, ALCOHOL AND MARIJUANA**



## PATH TO ADDICTION



## "JUST ONCE" WON'T HURT — RIGHT?

### A Gateway to Nowhere

You've heard all the "just say no" speeches and you know that drugs are dangerous. You're too smart to throw your future away on a deadly, stupid addiction. Then one night, at a party, a friend passes you a joint.



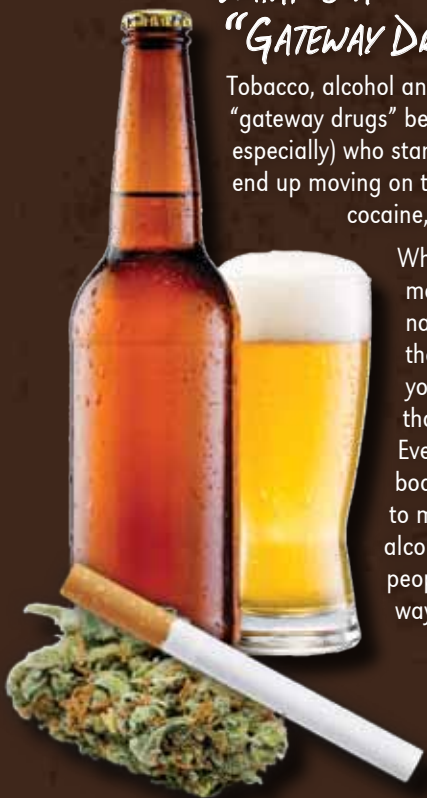
"Why not", you think to yourself as you take a hit. "It's not like I'm snorting coke or shooting heroin. It's just a little weed. What's the harm in that?"

The thing is, it's never "just" weed. Drugs like marijuana, alcohol and tobacco are all addictive substances that often become regular habits. What's more, people who use these drugs often end up trying harder stuff — that's why these types of drugs are called "gateway drugs." Smoking and drinking can lead to lots of long-term health problems, drug addiction and maybe even death.

## WHAT IS A "GATEWAY DRUG"?

Tobacco, alcohol and marijuana are called "gateway drugs" because people (teenagers, especially) who start abusing them often end up moving on to try harder drugs like cocaine, heroin, meth, or LSD.

When you use drugs, you're messing with your brain's natural chemistry. Use those drugs enough, and your body starts to crave that relaxed, buzzed feeling. Eventually, though, your body builds up a resistance to marijuana, tobacco and alcohol. That's when some people start looking for other ways to get high.



## UP IN SMOKE

### Tobacco and Your Health

Tobacco comes in many forms: there are cigarettes and cigars, of course; and there are also several kinds of smokeless tobacco, like chewing tobacco ("snuff" or "dip") and snus (pronounced "snooze"), which doesn't require the user to spit out the juices.

However, it doesn't matter whether you smoke it or chew it, people who use tobacco products are putting themselves at risk for some serious health problems, including:

- Emphysema
- Several types of cancer, including lung, mouth and throat
- Gum disease and tooth loss
- Heart disease

When you're a teenager, your brain is still growing and changing — and tobacco use can stunt your brain's growth. Nicotine, the main ingredient in tobacco products, gets into your bloodstream and causes your brain to release dopamine, a natural chemical that's released when you're doing something fun. Nicotine also damages your hippocampus (the part of your brain that controls your short-term memory). Studies have shown that tobacco use can make it harder to learn new things; and young smokers may even have lower IQs than young nonsmokers.

## DRUNK, DISORDERLY AND DEADLY

### The Effects of Alcohol

Alcohol is a type of drug known as a depressant — it messes with your brain's ability to send messages to your body. When you drink beer, wine, or liquor, your brain and body start to slow down, making it difficult to think, speak, or walk. It also affects your memory, sleep cycle and your ability to make decisions. This damage is permanent, and it can lead to problems later in life.

In the short term, alcohol can cause loss of coordination, nausea and vomiting, slurred speech and an inability to think clearly — many teens end up doing stupid things when they're drunk, like driving or having unprotected sex. In the long term, alcohol can cause all kinds of serious health problems, including:

- Alcoholism
- Liver disease
- Obesity
- Increased risk of stroke and cancer



## NO FUTURE

### Jesse's Story

At just 19 years old, Jesse is one of the youngest people at his rehab facility in Georgia. Jesse may look like a typical college kid, but he's been a heroin addict for the past three years.

Jesse wasn't always a junkie. When he was a freshman in high school, he was a straight-A student. One night, though, everything changed: Jesse was at a party, and his friend Danielle offered him a joint. Before he knew it, Jesse was smoking weed on a daily basis. He stopped getting good grades, and he stopped showing up for band rehearsal. After a year or so, he dropped out of school.

Jesse's parents kicked him out of the house when he was sixteen — they thought it would scare him into quitting drugs. Instead, Jesse moved in with some older guys that he met through his weed dealer. They introduced him to harder drugs, like ecstasy, cocaine, LSD and heroin.

Things changed for Jesse one night when he watched one of his friends OD after shooting up. Jesse had panicked and called 9-1-1, but his friend was dead before the paramedics arrived. That's when Jesse decided to sober up.

Rehab is a struggle for Jesse. It's been six months since he's used heroin, but he still craves it. Some nights, when he can't sleep, he thinks about his life and wonders how things would be different if he had never tried drugs.

It's too late for Jesse, though. His brain is fried from all of the drugs he's done — he speaks slowly, often forgetting what he was going to say. He'll probably never be able to go to college or get a decent job. All because he decided that a little weed wouldn't hurt.