



NINA'S STORY

A senior in high school, Nina had the seemingly perfect life. She had just received a full ride to the college of her choice, had just been voted "Most Likely to Succeed" and "Most Liked" by her classmates, and things were great between herself and her boyfriend, Brett. Nina definitely had it all... until she was hit head on by a drunk driver.

After months of hospitalization and recovery, Nina was finally able to start getting her life back on track. Even though her injuries healed, Nina still had serious pain. She talked to her doctor about her concern regarding painkillers since she had a family history of opioid abuse, and he recommended she try medical marijuana since they lived in a state where it is legal. "Legally protected marijuana dispensaries are associated with lower rates of dependence on prescription opioids and deaths due to opioid overdose," he told her. What he didn't tell her, however, is that marijuana dispensaries are also associated with higher rates of recreational marijuana use.

Nina started smoking marijuana every day, and even though it helped with her pain, she craved it more and more. Her cravings got so intense that she would miss work for days just so she could smoke pot. Nina's life quickly became less than perfect, and soon began a downward spiral.

THE TRUTH ABOUT GETTING HIGH

Think you know everything about medical marijuana abuse? Test yourself here.

1. Since marijuana comes from a plant, it can't be bad for you.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Cannabinoids are the chemical components of marijuana.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. The limbic system is a system in your brain that creates its own set of cannabinoids.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. Your brain produces its own set of cannabinoids, similar to those found in marijuana.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. Marijuana use can cause you to lose short and long-term memories.
 - a. True
 - b. False

REFERENCES

National Institute on Drug Abuse:
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana>

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

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MEDICAL MARIJUANA



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BENEFITS AND DANGERS



WHAT IS MEDICAL MARIJUANA?

The phrase “medical marijuana” refers to either using the whole unprocessed plant or its chemical extracts to attempt to treat a disease or particular symptom. When the marijuana plant is smoked, there is no difference between regular and medical marijuana, except perhaps the reason behind smoking it. Studies on cannabinoids, or the chemicals in marijuana, have led to two FDA-approved medications in pill form because they have eliminated the dangerous cannabinoids and left the beneficial ones alone.

As of yet, there have been no clinical studies done by the FDA to approve smoking marijuana for illnesses.

HOW DOES IT ALL WORK?

The relationship between our brains and cannabinoids is very complex, but here’s the most basic explanation.

Everyone’s brain creates its own set of cannabinoids, like those found in marijuana, through the endocannabinoid system. This system is responsible for many functions like appetite, sleep, emotions and movement. Cannabinoids work by interacting with specific receptors that are located throughout the nervous system and immune system, particularly CB1 receptors and CB2 receptors.



WHAT'S INSIDE?

Chemicals in Marijuana

There are at least 85 different chemicals in marijuana, but the main two are: tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD).

THC is known for its psychoactive properties and is the reason you feel buzzed after smoking or ingesting it. Illegal marijuana farmers have slowly cultivated the marijuana plant to have higher levels of THC to increase how high users feel. These higher levels of THC can be dangerous because they make the user feel higher anxiety and paranoia.

CBD is not psychoactive and is also believed to have several medicinal benefits, such as anti-inflammatory properties, alleviating pain and improving mood and appetite. Studies have shown that CBD can calm the nervous system, which may help with epilepsy and mental illnesses like schizophrenia.

At this point, scientists are working on creating more medications using the extracted CBD, but the FDA has not currently approved smoking the marijuana plant as a form of medication because of the dangerous side effects of THC.



RISKS AND REWARDS

The mistake that many teens make is believing that just because it is described as “medicinal,” marijuana is good for you. Even if your intention is for reasons other than simply getting high, marijuana contains psychoactive substances that change brain function that can result in alterations to perception, mood, or consciousness.



The high from marijuana doesn’t last forever, but the effect on brain development does. When marijuana users begin using as teenagers, the drug may reduce thinking, memory and learning functions, and marijuana can affect how the brain builds connections between the areas necessary for these functions.

Research shows that many users become addicted to marijuana. If a teenager starts using marijuana, his or her chances of becoming addicted are even higher. Someone who smokes marijuana may also become more likely to try harder drugs. That’s why marijuana is called a “gateway drug.”

The benefits of CBD simply don’t outweigh the risks of all the other chemicals found in marijuana.

THE REAL AND HARMFUL SIDE EFFECTS OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA

- Increased heart rate, which may increase the chance of heart attack
- Altered senses, even hallucinations
- Changes in mood
- Impaired body movement
- Difficulty with thinking and problem-solving
- Impaired memory
- Paranoia and anxiety
- Weight gain from over-eating