



WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana is the dried greenish-grey leaves and flowers of the hemp plant that is usually smoked. Slang terms for marijuana include, but are not limited to, “pot,” “weed,” “herb,” “Mary Jane” and “bud.” Marijuana has approximately 100 different chemicals, but the one that makes marijuana dangerous is THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol). THC is the psychoactive component of marijuana, and it is what gives the user the “high” feeling. 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.

According to a survey done in 2014, marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States. Of the 22.2 million people who reported using it, the largest age group smoking marijuana are teens and adolescents from the ages of 13-19.

SHORT TERM EFFECTS

Depending on the amount of marijuana smoked and the level of potency (how strong) the THC is, you can experience a variety of short-term effects. They may range from mild to extreme, and they can last for a few minutes to hours. Don't even put yourself at risk.

- 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
- Short-term memory problems
- Paranoia and anxiety

LONG TERM EFFECTS

Not Just Affecting Your Schoolwork

Smoking marijuana can lead to serious, long-term consequences that go beyond just feeling high.

- **Addiction.** Research shows that affects the pleasure and reward centers of the brain. If a teenager starts using marijuana, his or her chances of becoming addicted are higher than if an adult begins smoking marijuana.
- **Higher drug use.** Marijuana is considered a “gateway drug,” meaning it leads to harder drug use.
- **Weight Gain.** Marijuana users report weight gain because of their increased appetite.



RELATIONSHIP TO MARIJUANA USE AND SCHOOL

Other long-term effects go beyond messing with your weight; marijuana can mess with your entire future. Since most marijuana users are only 13-19 years old, it is worth looking into how their academic achievement is affected.

- The negative effects of marijuana use on memory, attention, and problem-solving can last much longer than a few hours—it can last as long as weeks or even months.
- A study done in 2012 showed that people who started smoking marijuana in their teens and had ongoing cannabis use lost an average of 8 IQ points between the ages of 13 and 38. The lost mental abilities did not fully return in those who quit marijuana as adults.
- People who smoke marijuana regularly are less likely than their non-smoking peers to finish high school, much less go to college or a trade school. This can be attributed to students skipping class and studying less.
- Several studies have also shown a relationship to lower income, unemployment, criminal behavior and welfare dependence. Overall, heavy marijuana users report having lower satisfaction with their lives.



NATHAN'S STORY

Life of a Loser

Nathan had always been an excellent student, but that changed when he started high school. Shy, and not very good at making friends, he started hanging out with the potheads of the school. They welcomed him because they thought he was funny when he was high. He started smoking when he was 14 and a freshman in high school and kept the habit up all the way until his senior year. With just a few months until graduation, reality began to set in, and he realized he'd have to buckle down to get his degree. He barely did enough work, but to the surprise of all of his teachers, he made it. “Things will be better when I'm working and in an apartment,” he thought. Only it wasn't at all what he expected.

Even though he had tried to quit smoking, he just couldn't give it up. Nathan just always thought it was more important to smoke marijuana than get up and do anything with his life. After not even bothering to call his boss to call into work, Nathan got a visit from his landlord. “You're a month late on rent. Where's my money?” Too high to realize the severity of the situation, Nathan laughed and shut the door in the landlord's face. She was back about an hour later slamming an eviction notice on his door. “You have 30 days to pay rent or get out!” she hollered through the solid door.

Thirty days went by, and Nathan still hadn't bothered to go into work to make his money for rent. He was pretty sure he was fired, but didn't really care. His boss had tried calling a few times, but Nathan never answered the phone. He just lit up another blunt. Moments later, the landlord was back, and this time with two police officers to escort Nathan from the apartment complex. The cops smelled the weed and saw his stash sitting on the coffee table. Nathan was arrested for possession and would have a new residence at the county jail.

Sitting on the concrete bench in the jail cell, Nathan thought to himself, “What would've happened if I had never smoked weed in the first place? Would I be in college right now? I could've actually done something with my life.”