

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Marijuana & Your Lungs

Marijuana smoke contains many of the same toxic, irritating chemicals found in tobacco smoke, including ammonia and hydrogen cyanide. It irritates the lungs, leading to chronic coughing, phlegm, and increased risk of bronchitis or respiratory infections. Exposure to secondhand marijuana smoke after birth puts infants and young children at risk for developing asthma and other breathing complications.

MARIJUANA AND YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

A healthy immune system protects both mother and child. Cannabis exposure during fetal development may weaken an infant's developing immune system, leaving them more vulnerable to severe infections early in life.

MARIJUANA AND BREASTFEEDING

THC is fat-soluble and passes into breast milk, where it can accumulate and be stored for extended periods. Even after the high wears off, a baby can still ingest THC through breast milk. To prevent potential neurodevelopmental risks, medical experts advise against using marijuana while breastfeeding.



TEST YOURSELF

How does marijuana affect your body?

Let's test your knowledge.

1. What is the main mind-altering chemical in marijuana?
a. Dopamine b. THC
c. Nicotine d. Triglycerides
2. How does THC pass from mother to fetus?
a. Through the placenta
b. Through skin to skin contact
c. Through the ovaries
3. Edibles generally take longer to act than smoked marijuana.
a. True b. False
4. Secondhand marijuana smoke is completely safe for infants.
a. True b. False
5. "Munchies" refers to an increase in appetite after using marijuana.
a. True b. False

ANSWERS: 1. b, 2. a, 3. a, 4. b, 5. a



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CAUSE AND EFFECT

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MARIJUANA AND YOUR BABY

WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana comes from the *Cannabis sativa* plant. When smoked, vaped, or ingested, it produces a high driven primarily by delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is a mind-altering chemical that travels quickly through the bloodstream into the brain when inhaled. Edibles and drinks take longer to process, but their effects can be significantly stronger and last longer.

When you use marijuana while pregnant, the fetus is also exposed. Just as nutrients pass from mother to baby through the placenta, THC and other harmful compounds cross the placental barrier, directly affecting fetal development.

NOT JUST YOUR STANDARD “PREGNANCY BRAIN”

Marijuana triggers an unnatural surge of dopamine, causing feelings of euphoria. However, it heavily impacts brain areas like the hippocampus (memory and reasoning) and the cerebellum and basal ganglia (motor control and balance). Impaired coordination while pregnant increases the risk of falls and physical trauma.

Prenatal exposure to THC can alter the baby’s developing brain architecture. Studies show that children exposed to cannabis in utero are at higher risk for long-term attention deficits, learning difficulties, impulsiveness, and behavioral challenges as they grow.



MARIJUANA AND YOUR HEART

Using marijuana can increase your heart rate by 20 to 50 beats per minute shortly after use. This rapid heart rate can worsen anxiety or panic. During pregnancy, cannabis use is associated with serious complications, including restricted fetal growth, low birth weight, preterm birth (labor before 37 weeks), and an increased risk of stillbirth.

MARIJUANA, YOUR MOUTH, AND MORNING SICKNESS

Smoking or vaping marijuana can irritate or burn the throat and mouth. While some women turn to cannabis for morning sickness, medical consensus confirms it is unsafe for a developing baby. OB-GYNs can prescribe safe, FDA-approved remedies for pregnancy-related nausea and vomiting. Additionally, increased appetite (“munchies”) can lead to excessive, non-nutritional weight gain during pregnancy.

MALLORY’S STORY

Mallory couldn’t wait to be a mom. She and her husband had tried for years to start a family without much luck, until finally, it happened! From that first moment her doctor confirmed she was pregnant, Mallory began to envision the kind of life she wanted for her baby. She couldn’t wait to tell her husband and her own mom the good news.

Those good feelings quickly faded as Mallory began to experience the worst morning sickness she could imagine over the course of the next few weeks. She began to actually lose weight from being so sick, and a friend suggested she try marijuana. “It’s all natural, and it’ll help with the morning sickness and your appetite,” she said.

Desperate to try anything, Mallory took a hit from her friend’s blunt, and began coughing. She had never tried marijuana before, and at first was nauseated by the smell of it. After some time smoking with her friend, Mallory’s heart began to race as she panicked. “What in the world is wrong with me? What am I thinking?”

As she began to pace around her friend’s apartment, she could feel her friend guide her to the kitchen table. Even though her appetite was better, Mallory said, “Thanks but no thanks. I think I’ll just go to my doctor and get a prescription for some anti-nausea meds. This stuff just made me feel way too panicky and anxious. That can’t be good for the baby.”

