

The Deadliest Side Effect of Medical Marijuana

There is so much debate on the subject of medical marijuana that one could begin to believe that there are still questions about whether or not the drug is even harmful.

But it has been known and well documented for many years that marijuana is a harmful drug and not one major American health organization accepts crude marijuana as medicine.

The fact that this debate is still being carried on in the media is no accident. So much pro marijuana information has made it into mainstream society that, according to recent surveys, children of today do not view marijuana to be as dangerous as did children of twenty years ago. It actually appears to young people and adults that the question of whether or not marijuana is harmful is undecided.

Young people are seeing this issue brought up regularly and it's important that it is put into some perspective for them.

In the Narconon Drug Abuse Prevention program we speak to students from third grade through college and often hear the question, "What is the story with medical marijuana?"

Although that question is regarded as complex, the answer actually is rather simple.

All drugs can be toxic and are potentially dangerous. Doctors and pharmaceutical companies are aware of this. This is why the proper dosages are clearly printed on the labels of prescription bottles.

Physicians know that most drugs don't really cure the patient; the body cures itself. Sometimes the body is too slow or doesn't even recognize the illness. In many of these cases a drug can help the body to overcome the ailment.

Even more often, drugs are used not to cure at all, but to ease the symptoms of disease.

Some students actually have gotten the false idea that marijuana can cure glaucoma or even cancer!

But all drugs produce effects other than those intended—side effects. So the task is to weigh the potential gain of a particular medication against its unwanted or damaging side effects.

The government body which approves or disapproves drugs for use in the United States is the Food and Drug Administration.

The US FDA has never approved marijuana for any use.

Marijuana is a Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substances Act. Schedule I drugs are classified as having a high potential for abuse, no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States and lack of accepted safety for use even under medical supervision. Other Schedule I drugs include cocaine, heroin and LSD.

Of the more than 400 chemicals in raw marijuana, only one is the reason for the uproar, Delta-9 tetra-hydro cannabinol (THC).

Studies have shown that THC is a neurotoxin. A neurotoxin is a substance that damages or impairs the functions of nerve tissue.

The benefits claimed by the proponents of medical marijuana include relief of nausea due to cancer chemotherapy and reduction of intraocular (inside the eye), pressure due to glaucoma. However, approved and effective medications to relieve these symptoms have been available for quite some time.

There is an approved drug called Marinol that isn't smoked, which contains synthetic THC and can be taken in more controlled doses. But even with this medication the manufacturer warns of side effects that include paranoid reaction, drowsiness, and abnormal thinking.

The short and long term effects of marijuana use include: memory loss, difficulty in learning, distorted perception, trouble with thinking and problem solving, loss of motor skills, decrease in muscle strength, increased heart rate, and anxiety.

Are any FDA-approved medications smoked?

No. Smoking is generally a poor way to deliver medicine. It is difficult to administer safe, regulated dosages of medications by smoking. Additionally the harmful chemicals and carcinogens that are byproducts of smoking create entirely new health problems.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), someone who smokes five joints per week may be taking in as many cancer-causing chemicals as may someone who smokes a full pack of cigarettes per day. Smoking one marijuana cigarette deposits about four times as much tar into the lungs as a filtered tobacco cigarette.

Marijuana's negative effects also last well beyond the initial use. THC is lipophilic, meaning the chemical is fat-bonding and gets stored inside a person's body for weeks, months and possibly even years after use ceases.

In our Narconon rehabilitation centers, we are faced daily with the ravaging effects of drug abuse. Those who come in to our programs didn't start on drugs yesterday; they traveled down a long road and made many wrong turns to get to the point of needing our help. The effort that is required to help these addicts at that point is monumental. Nearly all of them started down the road of addiction by first using marijuana, tobacco or alcohol.

The deadliest side effect of medical marijuana is the message being sent to our kids, the lie that marijuana is safe.

So it is imperative that we don't send that message. We must do our jobs to educate them as to the real facts and trust them to make the right decision.

By Tony Bylsma, ED CCDC

For help with
marijuana addiction:

Call Toll Free:
888-9NO-DRUGS or 888-966-3784

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