

Drug Facts: Marijuana/Cannabis



What Is Marijuana?

Marijuana and cannabis are terms that are often used interchangeably. However, there is a difference. *Cannabis* is where marijuana comes from and refers to all products made from that plant. Marijuana refers to parts of the plant that contain a high concentration of the active chemical, *Tetrahydrocannabinol* (THC).

THC is a mind-altering drug that produces a “high” that impacts mental state, slows reaction time, and reduces awareness. This drug can cause permanent damage to those under 25, because the brain is still developing.

Marijuana products are now legal in the state of Connecticut for individuals over the age of 21.

What Does It Look Like?

Marijuana is typically a green or brown mix of dried flowers, leaves, seeds, and stems from the cannabis plant.

How Is It Used?

Marijuana is commonly smoked. This can be in the form of a “joint” or “blunt” which is like a cigarette with marijuana instead of tobacco, or via a pipe or other smoking device. Vaping the drug has become common as well.

Marijuana is also consumed by “dabbing”, which involves taking a marijuana concentrate, vaporizing it, and inhaling the vapor. Concentrates are also put into food or drinks. It may not be obvious that these items contain marijuana, because some packaging resembles popular, well-known brands. People, particularly children, could unknowingly consume it in food form.

What Is Its Effect On The Brain?

Marijuana can affect many aspects of brain functioning. THC attaches to the structures of the brain that control pleasure, memory, thought, and coordination. Marijuana use can also hinder brain development in individuals under 25 because their brains are still developing, leading to potentially permanent effects.

- Marijuana can damage a developing brain leading to permanent memory difficulties.
- Marijuana impairs decision making, perception, and problem-solving skills.
- It can harm other parts of the body, including the lungs and heart.
- Overdose is rare, but marijuana toxicity is becoming more common.
- There is no way to reverse a marijuana overdose

Short term effects of marijuana use include:

- Short term memory problems
- Distorted perception
- Impaired ability to drive
- Difficulty with problem solving or thinking
- Slowed reaction time
- Loss of coordination

Chronic or prolonged use of marijuana can cause long term difficulties with memory and problem solving. Marijuana can also negatively impact mental health. Its use has been associated with increased rates of social anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia.



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What Is The Effect On The Body?

Marijuana use can lead to an elevated heart rate and blood pressure. Over time, this can increase a person's risk of stroke or other cardiovascular diseases.

Smoking marijuana can also damage the lungs in similar ways to tobacco, leading to conditions like bronchitis, asthma, and emphysema (a chronic disease of the lungs that makes it hard to breathe).

Another common side effect of the drug is increased appetite. As a result, marijuana use is sometimes associated with weight gain and related health conditions.

Stopping marijuana use after long-term use can lead to withdrawal. Physical symptoms of marijuana withdrawal include:

- Restlessness
- Decreased appetite
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Insomnia

What Is Marijuana Toxicity?

Marijuana toxicity has become increasingly prevalent. This may be due to the increased popularity of vaping and ingesting THC. These products make it harder to tell how much THC is consumed. Ingesting edibles can also take longer to produce an effect, leading people to consume more in an attempt to get the high faster.

Marijuana toxicity can lead to stomach upset, and can trigger acute psychosis, which is a condition that can result in delusions, hallucinations, and an inability to tell what is real and what is not. Marijuana toxicity can include other psychiatric symptoms such as dissociation, paranoia, fear of dying, and panic attacks.

Toxicity is especially dangerous in children because it takes less of a substance to affect a child than it would an adult. A child's body is less able to process the substance, and as a result, babies and children can become seriously ill from consuming marijuana products. All marijuana products should be kept away from children to prevent these negative health outcomes. The Be in the Know campaign distributes lock bags for cannabis to keep it safely stored. Lock boxes and bags are available through the Change the Script van and DrugFreeCT.org.

Marijuana toxicity can't be stopped once it starts. Treatment options include addressing the symptoms that a person is experiencing. Healthcare professionals can try to control the symptoms and give the body time to process the drug and get rid of it.

What Are The Overdose Effects?

Marijuana overdoses are less understood. The exact lethal dose in humans is not known yet.

However, it is important to note that some people use marijuana in combination with other substances. Combining marijuana with other substances can increase the chances of an overdose due to the effects of the different substances building on each other.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

www.ct.gov/DMHAS

Drug Free CT

<https://www.drugfreect.org/>

Be In The Know CT

<https://beintheknowct.org/>

24/7 Access Line

1.800.563.4086

2-1-1 of Connecticut

www.211ct.org or call 2-1-1

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

www.nida.nih.gov



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