

MARIJUANA USE & ITS EFFECT ON TEENS

Marijuana is an illegal, mind-altering drug produced from the hemp plant, which is usually smoked by the user. THC, the main active chemical (among 400 present) in marijuana, effects changes in the brain of the user. However, what is most troubling, is that marijuana today is more potent & teens are starting use at increasingly younger ages – during crucial brain development years.

What is the connection to a teen's mental health & marijuana use?

- *Young people who use it weekly have double the risk of depression later in life.
- *Teens aged 12 to 17 who smoke it weekly are three times more likely than non-users to have suicidal thoughts.
- *Marijuana use in some teens has been linked to increased risk for schizophrenia later in life.

What are the short-term side effects of marijuana use?

- *Memory & learning problems
- *Difficulty concentrating, thinking & problem-solving
- *Increased heart rate & drop in blood pressure
- *Perception distortions involving vision, sound, touch & time
- *Sudden feelings of anxiety, including panic attacks & paranoia
- *Runny nose, sore throat & wheezing

What are the long-term side effects of marijuana use?

- *May play a role in chronic respiratory problems
- *Possibly affects the immune system
- *Associated with motivational problems including apathy, impaired judgment, loss of ambition & an inability to carry out long-term plans

Can marijuana be addictive?

- *Chronic marijuana use has been associated with the development of tolerance in which the user may have a tendency to increase the amount used to produce similar desired effects.
- *In frequent users, there can be signs & symptoms of withdrawal including anxiety, insomnia, sweating, loss of appetite & craving THC.
- *People entering drug treatment programs often report marijuana as their primary drug of abuse, stating that they need help to stop using it.

TOBACCO USE & ITS EFFECT ON TEENS

Teens turn to tobacco for a variety of reasons – to fit in, as a form of rebellion, to relieve stress & to help lose weight. However, 70% of teen smokers wish they had never started and two-thirds have made at least one unsuccessful attempt to quit. They are also more likely to drink heavily & use illegal drugs such as cocaine and marijuana.

What makes tobacco so addictive?

*Nicotine is the addictive substance. It enhances the release of a number of brain chemicals that are associated with pleasure, appetite suppression and relaxation.

*For some people, nicotine is as addictive as heroin.

*Teens typically become addicted at relatively low doses of nicotine compared to adults. Smoking just one cigarette a day may cause withdrawal symptoms when trying to quit.

What other forms of tobacco are there besides “regular” cigarettes?

*There are cigars & imported cigarettes (ex. bidis, kreteks – these deliver higher concentrations of carbon monoxide & tar than regular cigarettes do).

*Smokeless tobacco, also known as chew or dip, is produced in the forms of snuff & chewing tobacco.

-Snuff is a fine-grain tobacco held in teabag-like pouches that users “pinch” or “dip” between their lower lip & gum.

-Chewing tobacco comes in shredded, twisted or “bricked” tobacco leaves. Bricks are pressed into small, soft blocks flavored with licorice & sugar.

Is smokeless tobacco less dangerous than cigarettes?

*No!! Surprisingly, the amount of nicotine absorbed into the bloodstream (through the tissues in the mouth) by sucking/chewing smokeless tobacco is 3 or 4 times higher than the amount delivered in cigarettes.

*There have been 28 carcinogens (things known to cause cancer) identified in chewing tobacco & snuff, and smokeless tobacco users actually have a higher risk of developing oral (mouth) cancer than cigarette smokers.

*Oral cancer can occur in the lips, tongue, floor of the mouth, roof of the mouth, cheeks, or gums, as well as enter the lining of the esophagus, stomach & bladder.

What are some of the side effects on a teen who smokes?

*They may produce phlegm more than twice as often as non-smoking teens.

*They may suffer from shortness of breath almost 3 times as often as non-smoking teens.

*Respiratory infections are more prevalent & more severe among smokers.

*In general, the body’s ability to heal is often slower in a smoker.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE: A Growing Problem Among Teens

The abuse of prescription drugs is on the rise among high school students. They think these drugs are safe because they have legitimate uses. But taking these drugs without being under a doctor's care to get high can be as dangerous (and addictive) as using illegal street drugs! And when you mix prescription drugs with other drugs of abuse, such as marijuana & alcohol, you are putting yourself at greater risk for drug interactions and overdose.

Many pills look similar, but depending on the type of drug & the dosage, the effects can vary greatly from mild to deadly! Three types of prescription medications are commonly abused – pain relievers, stimulants & sedatives/depressants. Over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold medicines (especially those with dextromethorphan) are also abused.

Pain Relievers (opioids/narcotics)

Examples: Oxy-Contin, Percocet, Percodan, Vicodin

- short-term effects: dizziness; lightheadedness; feeling faint; inability to urinate; itching; nausea; vomiting; breathing could stop (if dose too large/potent); you can die the very first time you abuse/misuse a prescription pain killer
- long-term effects: severe constipation; severe weight loss or malnutrition; disrupted menstrual cycles (girls); decreased testosterone levels (boys)

Stimulants

Examples: Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine

- short-term effects: dangerously high body temperatures; loss of appetite; inability to sleep; feelings of hostility, distorted thinking & paranoia; irregular heart beat & heart failure; increased heart rate & blood pressure; hallucinations; seizures; death
- long-term effects: severe weight loss or malnutrition; mental illness; periods of restlessness, delirium & panic; insomnia; exhaustion & mental confusion; feelings of hostility, distorted thinking & paranoia; heart problems; tolerance to the drug (need more for same effect); addiction

Sedatives/Depressants

Examples: Valium, Xanax

- short-term effects: drowsiness; loss of coordination; decreased inhibition; slurred speech, difficulty concentrating & making good judgments; large doses can cause a person to stop breathing leading to death
- long-term effects: decreased ability to think clearly; decreased coordination; reduced reflexes; difficulties with memory; depression; possible addiction; if physically dependent & you try to stop too quickly there can be seizure & death

Over-the-counter Cough & Cold Meds

Examples: syrups, lozenges, gel caps, tablets, capsules

- *in large quantities can cause hallucinations; loss of motor control & “out-of-body” sensations; loss of consciousness; seizures; brain damage & even death
- *can also cause fever; excessive sweating; nausea/vomiting; irregular heart beat; high blood pressure

ALCOHOL USE AND ITS EFFECTS ON TEENS

Use of alcohol is prevalent in today's society. But because a teenager's body and brain are still developing until about the age of 21, teens especially need to be aware of the effects alcohol can have on their body.

General Information

- *Alcohol first acts as a stimulant, but it is actually a depressant that alters perceptions, emotions and the senses.
- *The effects of alcohol may start within five to 10 minutes and last for hours.
- *A heavy night of drinking alcohol can impair a person's abstract thinking for up to 30 days. It will also seriously affect a person's judgment and coordination.
- *Large volumes of alcohol consumed in a short period of time may cause alcohol poisoning & even death.
- *95% of the alcohol taken into the body is absorbed into the bloodstream and therefore, in addition to going into the stomach & intestines, will travel to the brain & nervous system, liver, pancreas, bladder & kidneys and even muscles.
- *Alcohol has been linked to exercise-induced asthma; and severe allergic reactions could cause heart irritability leading to an irregular heart beat.
- *The short-term effects of alcohol are dependent on a variety of factors, including a person's size, weight, age and sex, as well as the amount of food and alcohol consumed.

Special Concerns for Teens

- *Research has shown that if a 15-year-old starts to drink, that teen is four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than someone who begins to use it as an adult.
- *Teens are at risk of becoming physically addicted to alcohol. Withdrawal from alcohol can be painful and even life threatening. Symptoms range from shaking, sweating, nausea, anxiety and depression to hallucinations, fever and convulsions.
- *Teens who use alcohol can become psychologically dependent on it to feel good, deal with life or handle stress. Their bodies may demand more and more to achieve the same kind of high experienced in the beginning.
- *Teens who drink regularly are at a higher risk for cirrhosis (a dangerous inflammation of the liver), pancreatitis (a dangerous inflammation of the pancreas), stroke and even cancer than those who do not.

Special Concerns for Females

- *A female's level of strength is negatively affected by the total life-time doses of alcohol.
- *A female's heart may be more sensitive than a males to the toxic effects of alcohol.

Short-term Effects

<i>low dose:</i>	dizziness	<i>high dose:</i>	slurred speech
	talkativeness		disturbed sleep
	increase in aggressiveness		nausea & vomiting
	impaired reasoning & judgment		impairment problems
	impaired coordination		hangover
			blackouts
			death

Long-term Effects

- alcoholism
- severe anxiety, tremors, convulsions & hallucinations
- can lead to permanent damage of vital organs, such as the brain & liver
- muscle damage & weakness in various muscles, including the heart
- can depress the immune system slowing healing time & affecting the body's ability to fight infection