

MEDICAL MARIJUANA

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Some states are voting this November whether to allow medical marijuana. This article presents facts not found in most mainstream news reports so you can make the best decision for yourself and your state.

This article was hard for me to write, as I tend toward an attitude that adults should be allowed to do as they wish, provided they take full responsibility for the consequences. However, a few considerations influence my thinking on this issue:

- Many parents today are very uninformed about marijuana, having either never tried it or just tried it a little themselves with no problems.
- Many parents are not even interested in their teenagers welfare, sadly, and allow their children to roam the streets unsupervised every weekend.
- The mainstream press and other media does not present the dangers of marijuana adequately at all.
- This is a critical time for society when people are just beginning to wake up to their spiritual potential. Sadly, marijuana use curtails or stops that potential completely.
- Most people today are severely malnourished and toxic. This probably makes the long-term effects of marijuana and all drug use even worse than in times past.

WHAT IS MARIJUANA AND HOW IS IT USED?

Marijuana, also called weed, pot, hash or cannabis, is derived from one variety of hemp, a commonly found plant, also called *Cannabis sativa*. The main active chemical in marijuana is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol; THC for short. The dried leaves and stems are usually smoked as a cigarette (joint) or in a pipe.

It is also smoked in blunts, which are cigars that have been emptied of tobacco and refilled with marijuana. Since the blunt retains the tobacco leaf used to wrap the cigar, this mode of delivery combines marijuana's active ingredients with nicotine and other harmful chemicals.

A more concentrated, resinous form is called **hashish**. This form is widely used in other nations, but not as much in the United States. Marijuana can also be baked or otherwise added into many common foods. Its effects are weaker in this form, but it will give users a high in this form as well.

HOW DOES MARIJUANA AFFECT THE BRAIN?

Scientists know a great deal about how THC acts in the brain to produce a high. When someone smokes or ingests marijuana, THC rapidly passes from the lungs or stomach into the bloodstream, which carries the chemical to the brain.

Here the THC damages many sensitive cells of the brain. These are sometimes called cannabinoid receptor cells. This is a misnomer, however. They are just sensitive cells that are damaged by THC.

THC will reduce some kinds of pain, nausea and other symptoms by a toxic mechanism, namely by damaging the sensitive cells of the brain that record pain. While this may help a few people, it dulls the mind, perhaps permanently. A prescription form of THC is available called Marinol.

Symptoms of brain damage due to THC and other components in marijuana. These include distorted perception, impaired coordination, difficulty in thinking and problem solving, and problems with learning and memory. Research has shown that marijuana's adverse impact on learning and memory can last for days or weeks after the acute effects of the drug wear off. This means that a regular user can be functioning at a suboptimal intellectual level all of the time.

Long-term use of marijuana alters the brain in ways similar to those seen after long-term abuse of other major drugs. For example, cannabinoid withdrawal in chronically exposed animals leads to an increase in the activation of the stress-response system and changes in the activity of nerve cells containing dopamine. Dopamine neurons are involved in the regulation of motivation and reward.

Spiritual effects of marijuana smoking, in particular. The human brain should keep developing well into a person's thirties or even forties. However, the destructive effects of marijuana on the brain makes further development of the finer brain centers more difficult. This is the saddest aspect of marijuana use, even in a recreational manner. There is no way to avoid this problem that I have found.

I speak with many sincere young men and women who assure me that marijuana is safe. I must tell them it is not only unsafe. It will slow or even halt the most wonderful mental and spiritual potential of their lives. Please listen and do not pay attention to those who say marijuana is harmless.

Unfortunately, most people who use pot have no idea that it is affecting them in this way because they don't realize what they

are missing. However, as a physician I am aware that most of these people simply do not function as well in a modern, complex society.

ADDICTIVE POTENTIAL OF MARIJUANA

Many claim that marijuana is not addictive. This is simply not true. Long-term marijuana abusers trying to quit report irritability, sleeplessness, decreased appetite, anxiety, and drug craving, all of which make it difficult to quit. About 6% of those who use marijuana will become addicted. This is about the same percentage of the number of social drinkers who become addicted to alcohol.

MARIJUANA AND MENTAL HEALTH

Many studies indicate an association between chronic marijuana use and increased rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and schizophrenia. The younger a person is at first use the more chance of serious mental illness as a result. This is because the brain is still developing well into a person's twenties and even thirties. This is when it is most vulnerable to damage from THC and other chemicals in marijuana.

It is not clear to what extent marijuana use during the teens and twenties causes mental problems, exacerbates them, or is used in attempt to self-medicate symptoms already in existence. Chronic marijuana use, especially in a very young person, may also be a marker of risk for mental illnesses, including addiction, stemming from genetic or environmental vulnerabilities, such as early exposure to stress or violence.

At the present time, the strongest evidence links marijuana use and schizophrenia and/or related disorders. High doses of marijuana can produce an acute psychotic reaction. In addition, use of the drug may trigger the onset or relapse of schizophrenia in vulnerable individuals.

EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA ON PHYSICAL HEALTH

Effects on the Heart. Marijuana increases heart rate by 20–100 percent shortly after smoking; this effect can last up to 3 hours. As with tobacco smoking, pot smokers have a much higher risk of heart attack in the first hour after smoking the drug. This may be due to the increased heart rate, as well as effects of marijuana on heart rhythms, causing palpitations and arrhythmias. This risk may be greater in aging populations or those with cardiac vulnerabilities.

Effects on the Lungs. Marijuana smoke contains carcinogens and other irritants. In fact, marijuana smoke contains 50–70 percent more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than does tobacco smoke. Marijuana users usually inhale more deeply and hold their breath longer than tobacco smokers do, which further increase the lungs' exposure to carcinogenic smoke. Regular marijuana smokers show dysregulated growth of epithelial cells in their lung tissue, which could lead to cancer

Marijuana smokers can have the same respiratory problems as tobacco smokers. These include chronic cough, more acute respiratory illnesses, and perhaps a greater risk of COPD or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. A study of 450 individuals found that people who smoke marijuana frequently, but do not smoke tobacco, have more health problems and miss more days of work than nonsmokers. Many of the extra sick days among the marijuana smokers in the study were for respiratory illnesses.

Effects on Daily Life. Research clearly demonstrates that marijuana use can cause serious problems in daily life. These include reduced cognitive abilities, and interference with social and professional life. Several studies associate workers' marijuana smoking with increased absences, tardiness, accidents, workers' compensation claims, and job turnover.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA BALLOT PROPOSITIONS

Proponents of these initiatives claim it will simply permit seriously ill people to obtain marijuana to allay pain, nausea and other symptoms. However, this is not what has occurred in California, Colorado and Montana, where very similar laws have passed. In these states, the following has happened:

- 1) Most marijuana goes to drug abusers, not the seriously ill.
- 2) Teen drug use is way up
- 3) Traffic accidents and traffic fatalities have risen significantly.
- 4) Crime has increased significantly, although proponents claim crime should decrease.
- 5) Pot-smokers gain unheard of impunity with employers and the law. This makes it hard to prosecute those who abuse the drug at work or elsewhere.

Let us explore these problems in more detail.

Problem #1. Most of the marijuana ends up being used by drug abusers, teenagers, college students, and recreational users with no serious medical problems at all. News stories by the Associated Press ([Medical Marijuana Facing](#)

[a Backlash](#)) and the New York Times ([When Capitalism Meets Cannabis](#)) have documented this problem in Montana and Colorado. What the proposition seems to say and what really happens are very different.

Proponents claim that safeguards against abuse are in the bills. However, experience in other states shows this is not so. For example, one supposed safeguard is that only licensed doctors can prescribe marijuana use. However, what happens is a handful of doctors set up practices where they see 50 – 100 people a day and do nothing but hand out marijuana cards to anyone with money to pay them.

Check out the website www.potdoc.com, for an example of one of these marijuana doctors. In Colorado, a handful of doctors write almost all the marijuana recommendations. One of them sees people for 5 minute appointments. In Montana, traveling marijuana caravans take pot doctors from town to town, handing out marijuana cards. This should be illegal. If a doctor openly prescribed Xanax for everyone or oxycontin for everyone, the licensing board would yank his license and he'd probably go to jail. However, so far, "medical marijuana laws" protect these marijuana doctors so the licensing board can't touch them. On his website, potdoc.com posts a letter from his lawyer saying, regarding the licensing board, his marijuana prescribing is "bulletproof."

A second supposed safeguard is to limit marijuana to people with very specific medical conditions. However, the list of approved medical conditions also includes "severe and intractable pain." That is totally subjective. Anyone can fake pain and it's impossible to disprove. Anything can be severe and intractable pain—a twisted ankle, a bad back, a skateboarding injury. So it's a perfect loophole for drug abusers to smoke all the weed they want, legally.

That might be okay if only a tiny amount of marijuana went through this loophole while most of it went to genuinely sick people who needed it. However, in other states with these laws, almost all the pot is smoked by drug abusers and genuine medical use is a rarity.

In the New York Times article ***When Capitalism Meets Cannabis***, the reporter spent 3 days visiting several marijuana dispensaries. Most of the "patients" he saw were under age 30. Everyone he interviewed had a diagnosis of severe pain. In the city he visited, all the marijuana dispensaries were located on college campuses. This sounds much more like recreational drug use rather than a medical use for severe illness.

According to narcotics officer who prefers to remain anonymous, in California, 98 percent of the medical marijuana patients do not have a serious or terminal illness. Seventy

percent of the patients are under age 40, which should be the healthiest segment of the population, not the sickest. Surveillance cameras show a huge increase in foot traffic at marijuana dispensaries between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning, suggesting recreational rather than medical use.

Problem #2. Teenage marijuana use will increase, and regular marijuana use is especially harmful to teenagers.

Research show that teenagers who smoke pot heavily have difficulty with [memory](#), [attention](#) and problem-solving, [find it harder to learn](#), [get lower grades](#), are less motivated, and are [less likely to finish high school](#) or [college](#). Once they've finished or left school, they have [higher job turnover](#), [less satisfying careers and earn less money](#) than pot-smoking peers. No reasonable parent wants their kids smoking pot.

In fact, teenage marijuana use has been steadily decreasing over the past decade as teens recognize the very real problems it can cause. *But the decrease has been far, far less in states with medical marijuana laws.*

Some pro-marijuana advocates use only half this statistic, claiming that teenage marijuana use is actually decreasing in medical marijuana states. That's true, but they're not mentioning that teen marijuana use has decreased everywhere, and is decreasing far faster in states without medical marijuana laws.

One reason teenagers smoke more pot in states with medical marijuana laws is that they begin to see pot as a benign medication for everyday aches and pains rather than as a harmful, addictive drug. Teens, who are fairly savvy, start to see it as safe, and are more likely to use it and to use it more often.

Also, medical marijuana laws tend to make marijuana more available for everyone. For example, in an NPR story earlier this year, a young lady in Colorado was quoted saying that all her friends had marijuana cards, so it was always available. And when a drug is more available, more people use it, especially teens.

Parents should know that when a medical marijuana law is passed in their state: 1) their child is much more likely to have friends who smoke marijuana, 2) their child is more likely to smoke marijuana, and 3) the child will probably start at an earlier age and smoke it more often than they would have without medical marijuana laws.

Problem #3. DUIs and fatal auto accidents will increase significantly. Research on stoned driving and the reports from states with medical marijuana laws make it clear that marijuana poses similar problems as alcohol on our roads.

A research study by the University of Auckland compared a random sample of drivers with people who had either been killed or hospitalized by car accidents. Regular and heavy pot-smokers were 9.5 times more likely to get into a serious accident as non-users.

Another study looked at patients in a hospital trauma unit who had been in car or motorcycle accidents. Fully 32 percent had marijuana in their bloodstreams.

A study published in the ***New England Journal of Medicine*** had strikingly similar results. They found that 33 percent of people stopped for reckless driving tested positive for marijuana. This represents a huge percent of serious and fatal traffic fatalities caused by marijuana.

Marijuana advocates often insist that marijuana never killed anyone. However, one look at the stoned driving statistics should make it clear that's not true. They also frequently argue that marijuana is safer than alcohol. Judging by these statistics, it is very likely that the main reason alcohol kills more people on the highway than marijuana is because it is more widely available, not because it is more inherently dangerous.

When Montana first passed its marijuana law, very few people were prescribed medical marijuana. Then marijuana caravans fanned out across the state, bringing with them doctors whose only job was to hand out marijuana cards. In less than a year, the number of "medical marijuana" users increased 5-fold. Shortly after that, according to Montana narcotics chief Mark Long, marijuana DUIs skyrocketed, as did the number of fatal car accidents where one of the drivers had marijuana in his blood stream.

Problem #4. Crime will increase, not decrease it medical marijuana supporters claim. Those in favor both of medical marijuana and legalization argue that it will decrease crime, especially at the border. Once again, evidence from states with medical marijuana laws indicates the opposite occurs. The reasons are:

- According to the Department of Justice, about 60% of the crime associated with addictive drugs occurs simply because people who are high or stoned do stupid, violent things.
- An additional twenty percent of all crime comes from users who are unable to hold jobs, so they resort to crime to live.

Only 20 percent of crime comes from gangs and other violence among drug sellers, but unfortunately that gets most of the news coverage. If we legalize pot, this 20 percent will vanish. However, the other 80% tends to increase.

A study published in the ***Journal of Addictive Diseases*** in 2001, found a link between heavy marijuana use and serious crime, including attempted homicide, weapons offenses and reckless endangerment.

Problem #5. Medical marijuana laws protect pot-smokers in ways we'd never tolerate from people who abuse alcohol or prescription drugs. Most of the marijuana laws say marijuana cardholders can't be arrested for DUI based on "the presence of metabolites or components of marijuana that appear in insufficient concentration to cause impairment." In other medical marijuana states, when police have tried to prosecute stoned drivers, the Marijuana Policy Project used its millions to litigate everything, until prosecutors gave up.

Most of the medical marijuana laws also state that an employer can't discipline an employee or send him home based on a drug test showing "the presence of metabolites or components of marijuana that appear in insufficient concentration to cause impairment." In effect, this means that workers can show up high or even stoned and employers cannot discipline them as they can workers who show up intoxicated with other substances such as alcohol.

These laws often also say that no landlord may refuse someone as a tenant for being a cardholder, even if the cardholder lives 25 miles from the nearest dispensary and is allowed to grow marijuana in his home. This means that tenants may be growing and smoking pot all day and landlords may not take any action against the tenants.

The effect of these laws, especially when combined with the threat to litigate every case, is that pot-smokers will drive stoned with impunity. Whether they're surgeons, truck drivers, crane operators or teachers, they will show up to work stoned with impunity. Drug-free workplace rules will not apply.

The Marijuana Policy Project (MPP)

This benign-sounding, well-funded group is devoted to legalizing pot. They knowingly push for medical marijuana laws that are intentionally full of loopholes. It is time to say no to those who wish to endanger our children, our roads, and all aspects of society by legalizing a toxic substance that provides little positive benefit for society.

References

1. Good references are found at www.keepazdrugfree.com.
2. many other sites also contain hundreds of references concerning the dangers of marijuana use.

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