

Marijuana

Weed: New Facts, Old Fiction

Marijuana is a common name for the drug contained in the leaves and flowering tops of the hemp plant, known scientifically as *cannabis sativa*. The plant has been cultivated for both its fiber content and its medicinal and psychoactive effects for at least 4,000 years, but it has generated heated controversy and emotional debate in this country since use was outlawed in 1937. Yes, marijuana is illegal. Marijuana is a Schedule I substance under the Controlled Substances Act. Schedule I drugs, have a high potential for abuse and serve no legitimate medical purpose in the United States. Slang names include pot, reefer, chronic, grass, and weed.

Marijuana generally refers to the dried, shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers of the cannabis plant. This mixture typically is green, brown, or gray in color and may resemble tobacco. While lower quality marijuana usually includes all parts of the cannabis plant, higher quality marijuana often is composed only of the buds and flowering top of the plant.

The main psychoactive drug in marijuana is delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol or THC. It activates receptors in the brain called anandamides, which trigger the drug's effects. Subjective effects include mild sensory distortions, feelings of euphoria, and increased appetite. Objective effects include reddening of the eyes and increased heart rate.

Even at lower doses marijuana impairs attention and coordination and affects the way the mind processes information. Because of these effects marijuana use has contributed to automobile, household, and occupational accidents, resulting in harm to the user and to others. High doses of marijuana may result in image distortion, loss of personal identity, and hallucinations.

The abuse of marijuana also can cause serious physical and mental problems including frequent respiratory infections, impaired memory and learning ability, increased heart rate, anxiety, and panic attacks. Individuals who regularly abuse the drug may experience the same problems as tobacco smokers including cough, phlegm, chronic bronchitis, and frequent chest colds. In addition because marijuana contains toxins and carcinogens marijuana smokers increase their risk of cancer of the head, neck, lungs, and respiratory tract.

For more information check out the web site www.usdoj.gov/ndic or www.doitnow.org information provided by ABC and Drug Free Communities.