

STRAIGHT UP FACTS ABOUT MARIJUANA AND TOBACCO USE

By Sharon Suman, Leave the Pack Behind

Contrary to popular belief, marijuana is not a risk-free substance, and is not a safe alternative to tobacco. Though for some cigarette smokers trying to quit, it may be tempting to use marijuana as a substitute, research has shown that marijuana use may make it harder to quit smoking.

What's Marijuana? Marijuana is a psychoactive product that comes from the flowering tops of the female plant known as *Cannabis Sativa*. It is the most commonly used illicit drug in Canada.

How does Marijuana affect the body? All forms of Marijuana are mind-altering. They all contain THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), the main active chemical in marijuana. Marijuana's effect on the user depends on its potency of THC and the experience of the user. After using marijuana, THC is absorbed into the bloodstream and it travels to the brain.

How's marijuana administered? Smoked using hand rolled joints (blunts), water pipes, regular pipes, vaporizers (medical use) and **commonly combined with tobacco** to assist with burning and to titrate the effect.

Health Risks related to Smoking Marijuana? Marijuana is a powerful intoxicant, negatively affecting the brain and central nervous system. Its use leads to a variety of short-term and longer-term effects – on memory, concentration, coordination, decision making, planning etc., which may affect academic performance, resulting in loss of potential. In people at high risk of developing schizophrenia, marijuana may bring on symptoms earlier. Regular users of marijuana can experience growing tolerance and dependence. And though many people don't know this, marijuana smoke contains more tar and more of some cancer-causing chemicals than tobacco smoke.

People generally don't smoke as many marijuana cigarettes as tobacco cigarettes. Wouldn't smoking fewer marijuana cigarettes mean that the adverse health effects aren't as significant?

A few studies indicate that inhaled smoke from any burning plant product causes the same type of damage to lungs and throat as cigarette smoke. The way marijuana is smoked contributes to this respiratory and cardiopulmonary damage. Although people who smoke marijuana generally smoke fewer marijuana cigarettes than people who smoke tobacco cigarettes, they tend to inhale more smoke per puff and hold it in their lungs for as much as four times longer. **Compared with smoking one tobacco cigarette - smoking one marijuana joint puts 5 times more carbon monoxide in your bloodstream. You inhale 3 times more tar and 1/3 more of that tar will remain in your respiratory tract.** Marijuana smoke also contains 50-70% more carcinogenic compounds compared to tobacco smoke, so ***smoking three to five joints per day has the same cancer-causing effect as smoking a pack of cigarettes every day!*** On top of that, when you smoke a joint, there is often no filter, the joint is usually smoked all the way to the end, and the smoke is usually a higher temperature.

References: Websites:

- http://www.camh.net/About_Addiction_Mental_Health/Drug_and_Addiction_Information/about_marijuana.html
- <http://surrey.rcmp.ca/ViewPage.action?languageId=1&siteNodeId=154&contentId=7054>

Did you know?

- Smoking marijuana irritates your lungs and has been linked to chronic cough and bronchitis. It may also make asthma worse.
 - Marijuana that you buy illegally may contain other drugs, or harmful pesticides or fungus.
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Tobacco/Marijuana Connections?

There is evidence that tobacco and marijuana use are connected behaviours.

- Using Canadian data Leatherdale et al. (2007) found that young adults who currently smoke cigarettes were more likely to use marijuana than were ex-smokers or never-smokers.
 - Using data from a 10-year study of nearly 2000 young Australians, Patton et al. (2005) determined that:
 - Even a *transient* phase of weekly marijuana use during the teen was associated with a large (i.e. eightfold) increase in the odds of later initiation of tobacco use
 - Daily marijuana use among non-nicotine dependent 21-year-old smokers tripled their odds of being nicotine dependent at age 24
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Tobacco/Marijuana Use at MAC?

The NCHA (National College Health Assessment) **McMaster University** Survey conducted in **Spring 2009** indicated that:

- 11.9% of students reported smoking tobacco cigarettes in the previous 30 days, with 2.8% doing so on a daily basis.
- 14.4% of students reported smoking marijuana in the previous 30 days, with 1.5% doing so on a daily basis

(This survey was conducted via email to 5000 randomly selected 1st to 3rd year students. Overall response proportion was 19.5%. n=950)

Want Help Finding Healthy Alternatives When Quitting Smoking?

Talk to your health care provider, or pharmacist or visit the Leave the Pack Behind Team on campus (MUSC B106). Email us at ltpb@mcmaster.ca or call ext.26051.

Come visit Leave the Pack Behind! We are a student run tobacco awareness program operating Display Booths twice a week at MUSC or Mills Library Lobby. Check out our website for more information www.leavethepackbehind.org/mcmaster