



# Marijuana Is Addictive, Destructive And Dangerous

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## Commentary & Analysis

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As a nation we are not yet ready to answer this question: Are we ready to legalize marijuana.

A prerequisite question must be answered first. It takes its cue from what physicians ask themselves before prescribing medications. It is this: What are the dangers vs. the benefits of marijuana?

From my perspective as an addiction psychiatrist it is clear that many see only one side of this two-pronged question. They herald the benefits of marijuana and claim it is benign. Since 1982, I have treated literally several thousand individuals suffering from all varieties of addiction, including marijuana dependency and abuse. From this clinical experience, I have taken away a strong conviction that marijuana is dangerous.

"Marijuana cannot be considered anything but an abusable and addictive drug."

This essay is not meant to be a rigorous scientific treatise. The science is still evolving and should be carefully heeded. Rather, it is meant to alert people to the simple fact that marijuana is a dangerous drug. It must not be seen as benign. It cannot be considered as anything but an abusable and addictive drug.

The adverse health effects marijuana potentially causes are becoming increasingly apparent. People who smoke marijuana are more likely to have wheezing, exercise-related shortness of breath, chest tightness, morning sputum production and some airway obstruction.

The more marijuana used, the more likely the risk of developing head and neck cancer. Its smoke contains 50% to 70% more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke. Deficits in memory, manual dexterity and sustained attention have been shown to persist for days or weeks after the last use of marijuana. While regularly smoking these problems are likely to be continuous. Marijuana has been shown to impair perception, speed of motion and accuracy in tasks. When THC (the psychoactive ingredient of marijuana) levels increase in the blood, the probable responsibility for motor vehicle accidents increases. An estimated 9% of those who use marijuana will become addicted to it.

These findings speak for themselves: marijuana is not a benign substance. It has real adverse health effects. Marijuana addiction is a reality.

Marijuana has the potential to interfere with an adolescent's emotional, cognitive and ethical growth. People in recovery often note that they stopped maturing when they first started using drugs. This observation is supported by the facts of their lives and the observations of family, friends and professionals working with them.

"Even when not using on a daily basis, planning to obtain, obtaining, using, recovering from the effects and dealing with the consequences can be at best a distraction and at worst disabling."

Even when not using on a daily basis, planning to obtain, obtaining, using, recovering from the effects and dealing with the consequences can be at best a distraction and at worst disabling. Marijuana and the activity surrounding it can occupy ever-increasing time and energy, taking the teen away from everyday growth-enhancing experiences. When a person has been caught up in substance use throughout their adolescence, he or she finds when trying to rebuild their lives, they have no foundation from which to start. They have to create themselves and their life anew.

What benefit could marijuana provide that would justify the risk of such pain and hardship?

Young or old, the use of marijuana easily drains energy and motivation from a regular, not necessarily daily, user. The person still performs the various roles of life, but they are not fully present. Family and friends observe this and feel a real loss. The marijuana user may complain that he or she is

helpless to stop, lack motivation and are prevented from using their abilities and talents to their fullest. Or they might just deny that anything is wrong.

We must not allow ourselves to be lulled into thinking that marijuana is somehow safe because it is “not as bad” as other drugs or alcohol. This drug should be measured on the basis of its own destructive effects and not by a false comparison with other substances.

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