

Marijuana

Marijuana, or *cannabis sativa*, is the most widely used *illicit* drug in the United States. Marijuana is a mind-altering drug which distorts perception and diminishes motor skills. Known as a “gateway drug,” marijuana frequently opens the door to use of other drugs. Commonly known as grass, pot, herb, or weed, marijuana is a tall, leafy, dark-green plant that is cultivated for street sales.

Marijuana gets its hallucinogenic properties from the chemical THC which is found throughout the marijuana plant but is concentrated in oils found in the leaves and in the seeds. Through hybridization, marijuana grown today is many times more potent than that grown even 10 years ago. It is grown extensively out-of-doors in warm climates, both in the United States and in other countries, and indoors under lights in cooler locations.

Smoking is the most common method of using marijuana. The leaves and other parts of the plant are dried and then crumbled into smaller pieces that are then rolled into a cigarette called a “joint” or burned in pipes or water pipes called “bongs”. Occasionally, small cigars are hollowed out and filled with marijuana for smoking. Marijuana also is sometimes added to food and ingested.

People under the influence of marijuana are said to be “high”. Short-term effects of marijuana include difficulty in thinking and problem solving, distorted perception, problems with memory and learning, loss of coordination and increased heart rate. Long-term marijuana use can lead to increased absences from work, tardiness, accidents, workers’ compensation claims, job turnover, depression and anxiety. Marijuana users have an increased risk for impairment of the immune system, risk of cancer in the head, neck and lungs, chronic cough, bronchitis and emphysema.

Men who use marijuana may have a lower sperm count. Women have increased risk for infertility and babies born to women who used marijuana while pregnant have an increased risk of neurological disorders.