

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Marijuana & Your Lungs

You only have two lungs, and marijuana can have some of the same negative side effects on them as tobacco. Like tobacco smoke, marijuana smoke has a ton of chemicals, including tar, that irritate your bronchial passages and lungs, which can result in wheezing, coughing, and an increase in phlegm. People with asthma or cystic fibrosis can have an increase in their symptoms, and even people without those conditions can see an increase in bronchitis and other lung infections. If your body doesn't receive enough oxygen, your organs will eventually begin to shut down. Is feeling high really worth it?

YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

Your immune system is what helps keep you well. If it's compromised, you put yourself at risk by becoming very sick without the ability to fight it off naturally. A simple cold, that would normally make you feel uncomfortable at worst, could land you in the hospital. THC and other chemicals in marijuana can affect your immune system, but more research is needed to determine how fully your immune system can be seriously messed up.



TEST YOURSELF

How does marijuana affect your body? Let's test your knowledge.

1. What is the main component in marijuana that makes the user feel high?
a. Dopamine b. THC
c. Nicotine d. Triglycerides
2. What is the part of the brain that helps you process information and may be affected by marijuana?
a. Left Atrium b. Blood Vessels
c. Hippocampus d. Hypothalamus
3. You feel the effects faster when you ingest marijuana through food or drink than when you smoke it.
a. True b. False
4. What effects does marijuana NOT have on your lungs?
a. Increase in phlegm b. Coughing
c. Wheezing d. Opening of airways
5. "Munchies" describes what happens when you smoke marijuana and have an increase in appetite.
a. True b. False

ANSWERS: 1. b, 2. c, 3. b, 4. d, 5. a



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MARIJUANA AND YOUR BODY



WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana comes from the hemp plant *Cannabis Sativa*, and when smoked or ingested, the user quickly begins to feel high. The chemical responsible for this feeling is the delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol—more commonly known as THC. It's the main mind-altering ingredient in marijuana that causes a bunch of side effects to different parts of your body. When you inhale marijuana smoke into your lungs, THC quickly makes its way through your bloodstream into your brain. If you eat or drink marijuana, it will take longer for you to feel the effects, but they're much more magnified.

Long-term effects are dependent upon a few variables: how often marijuana is taken, how much is taken, and how often it's taken. Since marijuana is illegal in the United States, studies to determine long-term effects are challenging and costly.

MIND NUMBING

Effects on Your Brain

When you smoke or ingest marijuana, the THC causes your brain to release a significant amount of dopamine, which is a chemical that's connected to feelings of happiness. When you do any activity that you enjoy, like hanging out with friends or spending time with your pet, your brain releases dopamine. When you use marijuana, your brain releases too much dopamine, which can make you feel high.

It also affects other areas of the brain like your hippocampus, cerebellum and basal ganglia. The hippocampus helps you process information, and when THC is involved, your judgment becomes impaired and the ability to make memories may be compromised. Teens that use marijuana before their brain is truly finished developing have a harder time with memory, problem solving, and the ability to concentrate. The cerebellum and basal ganglia are parts of your brain that control motor functions like movement and balance. It's extremely dangerous to drive while under the influence of marijuana because your coordination and reflex response time are greatly affected.

YOUR HEART AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

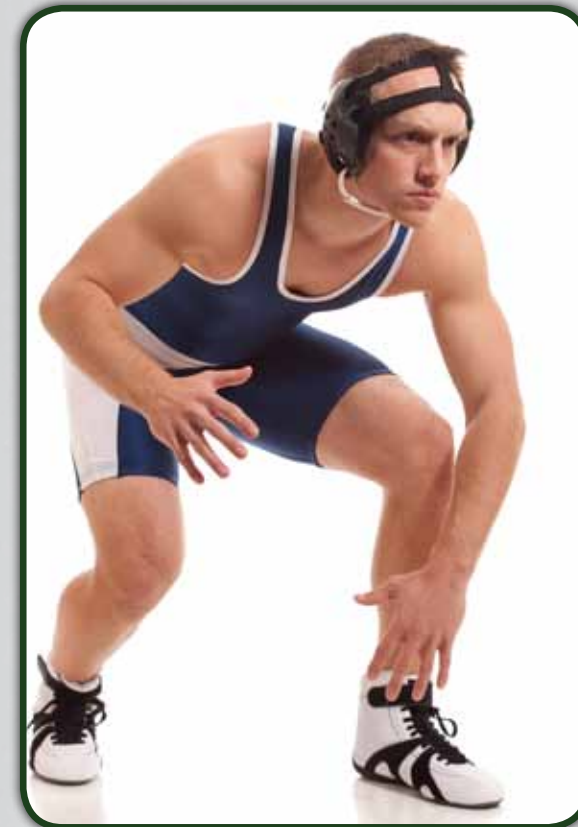
Within minutes of using marijuana as the THC spreads throughout your body, your heart rate may increase by 20 to 50 beats per minutes. Many people who use marijuana report feeling anxious or paranoid because their heart is racing so fast. It may be a combination of anxiety, or it may just be how your heart reacts to THC. Regardless, a rapid heart rate may be deadly if you have heart disease because it can lead to a heart attack.

Your heart isn't the only thing affected in your circulatory system; your blood vessels can be affected too. The reason your eyes become bloodshot after smoking is because marijuana causes the blood vessels to expand. While this may temporarily relieve the symptoms of glaucoma, the other negative side effects are just too hard to ignore.

YOUR MOUTH AND DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

Since marijuana is typically smoked in a joint, it is possible to sting or burn your mouth. Your throat can also be burned or irritated while you're inhaling.

The rest of your digestive system can also be impacted by marijuana use. Nausea and vomiting are common side effects when marijuana is eaten because of how your liver is able to process it. Your liver can also be damaged because it's trying to break down something that should never be in your system in the first place. Despite possible damage to your liver and digestive system, marijuana use also results in an increase in appetite, also known as the "munchies." Eating too much high-calorie food as a result of an increase in appetite can result in weight gain.



JERRY'S STORY

Jerry was one of those guys that was adored by everyone. All of his teachers loved him because even though he wasn't always the smartest kid in the class, he worked extremely hard and was always respectful. Underclassmen looked up to him, and he just got along with all of the different groups of people. He was even in line for a wrestling scholarship to his favorite school. That all changed when he started smoking dope.

He thought that because it was natural, marijuana was safe to use. After a few months, everything about him changed. He became lethargic and uninterested, and his grades suffered. He began to gain weight because of the munchies, and since he was unmotivated to go to practice, he lost his scholarship. He started to get sick all of the time, and couldn't shake something as simple as the common cold. As he sat in the chair waiting for his doctor to come in, all he could think was, "How could I let weed do all of this to me?"