

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Marijuana & Your Lungs

Like tobacco smoke, marijuana smoke has a ton of toxic chemicals, including ammonia and hydrogen cyanide. These poisonous chemicals 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 you smoke marijuana while pregnant or even after the baby is born, they can be at risk for asthma and other breathing problems, too. Secondhand smoke from marijuana can be just as dangerous for babies and young children as tobacco cigarettes.

MARIJUANA AND YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

Your immune system is what helps keep you well. If it's compromised, you put yourself at risk of 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. Infants and young children already have vulnerable immune systems, and marijuana use while the mother was pregnant with them may increase their risks of a weakened immune system.

MARIJUANA AND BREASTFEEDING

Even if you don't smoke while pregnant or even around your baby after they're born, the chemicals from marijuana can be passed through breast milk. THC is slowly released over time after the initial high has gone away, so your baby could still be exposed even after you stop using marijuana. Studies and data are limited on breastfeeding and marijuana, so to limit any possible risk, breastfeeding mothers should avoid using marijuana altogether.



TEST YOURSELF

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

1. What is the main component in marijuana that makes it addictive?
a. Dopamine b. THC
c. Nicotine d. Triglycerides
2. How does marijuana pass from the mother to the fetus?
a. Through the placenta
b. Through skin to skin contact
c. Through the hippocampus
d. Through the ovaries
3. You feel the effects faster when you ingest marijuana through food or drink than when you smoke it.
a. True b. False
4. Secondhand smoke from marijuana is safer than secondhand smoke from tobacco.
a. True b. False
5. "Munchies" describes what happens when you smoke marijuana and have an increase in appetite.
a. True b. False

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



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MARIJUANA AND YOUR BABY

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.

When you ingest marijuana while pregnant, either by smoking or eating, the fetus is also at risk. Just like nutrients are passed through the placenta from the mother to the fetus, drugs can also be passed the same way.

NOT JUST YOUR STANDARD "PREGNANCY 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, your brain releases a normal amount of dopamine. When you use marijuana, your brain releases too much of it, 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. The cerebellum and basal ganglia are parts of your brain that control motor functions like movement and balance. If you use marijuana while pregnant, you may become dizzy and fall, which can cause you to miscarry. You can also make poor decisions that you wouldn't normally make if you were sober that could put you and your unborn baby in harm's way. Many pregnant women already go through being forgetful and a bit scatterbrained while pregnant. Do you really want to make it worse by being high? Marijuana use while pregnant can also cause changes to the fetus's brain. Since the hippocampus is the part of the brain that helps you make memories, people whose mothers used marijuana or other drugs while pregnant with them may suffer from learning disabilities and behavioral issues.



MARIJUANA AND YOUR HEART

Within minutes of using marijuana, your heart rate may increase by 20 to 50 beats per minute. Many people who use marijuana report feeling anxious or paranoid because their heart is racing so fast. A rapid heart rate may be deadly if you have heart disease because it can lead to a heart attack, or it can even cause you to go into labor much sooner than expected. Not only can babies whose mothers used marijuana during pregnancy be much smaller than average, there's also a higher risk of stillbirth. Stillbirth means a woman gives birth to a baby who has already died. Preterm birth is another increased risk, which is when a mother goes into labor before 37 weeks.

MARIJUANA, YOUR MOUTH, AND MORNING SICKNESS

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. Many women mistakenly believe that marijuana can help with morning sickness, but there's just not conclusive studies done to prove that. If you suffer with morning sickness, your obstetrician-gynecologist can prescribe FDA approved drugs to treat nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. 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 that isn't just related to being pregnant.

MALLORY'S STORY

Mallory couldn't wait to be a mom. She and her husband had tried for years to start a family without much luck, until finally—it happened! From that first moment her doctor confirmed she was pregnant, Mallory began to envision the kind of life she wanted for her baby. She couldn't wait to tell her husband and her own mom the good news.

Those good feelings quickly faded as Mallory began to experience the worst morning sickness she could imagine over the course of the next few weeks. She began to actually lose weight from being so sick, and a friend suggested she try marijuana. "It's all natural, and it'll help with the morning sickness and your appetite," she said. Desperate to try anything, Mallory took a hit from her friend's blunt, and began coughing. She had never tried marijuana before, and at first was nauseated by the smell of it. After some time smoking with her friend, Mallory's heart began to race as she panicked. "What in the world is wrong with me? What am I thinking?"

As she began to pace around her friend's apartment, she could feel her friend guide her to the kitchen table. Even though her appetite was better, Mallory said, "Thanks but no thanks. I think I'll just go to my doctor and get a prescription for some anti-nausea meds. This stuff just made me feel way too panicky and anxious—that can't be good for the baby."

