



02. FOR YOUTH

MARIJUANA... GET THE FACTS KNOW THE RISKS

This section of the booklet gives you the facts about marijuana. At the other end there is information for your parents. In the middle we have a section that might help you and your parents talk about marijuana so that you can make a conscious, informed decision about it.

IT'S ALL ABOUT INFORMING YOURSELF

A lot is asked of you at this point in your life so it doesn't hurt to talk things through first. You can talk to your parents, your friends, the school nurse, your family doctor or a counsellor. All of them can help increase your understanding of a difficult situation. You're on your way to adulthood, and learning to make healthy choices now is important to your future.

Marijuana, pot, grass, weed, smoke—these are all the names for marijuana that you may hear. You may have heard even more. They all come from the cannabis plant, which grows all over the world—even in Canada. Hashish and hash oil also come from these plants.

You may think that everyone is doing it—in fact, that is not true, everyone is not doing it. A recent survey* taken with people just like you revealed that less than 3% of all youth reported using it daily.

* Health Canada—Youth and Marijuana Quantitative Research. Final Report. December 2003.



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WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE AND WHAT IT CONTAINS

MARIJUANA SMOKE CONTAINS MORE THAN 400 CHEMICALS, SOME OF WHICH ARE THE SAME CANCER-CAUSING SUBSTANCES FOUND IN TOBACCO SMOKE.

IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT BEFORE, HERE'S WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- 01. Marijuana—Plant
- 02. Marijuana leaves and seeds
- 03. Hash
- 04. Hash oil

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MARIJUANA AND ITS EFFECTS

SO WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Using marijuana in any of its forms poses risks to the user. You should be aware that there are health risks, psychological risks, safety risks and legal risks. These are detailed for you a little further on.

RESEARCH SHOWS US THAT THE EARLIER A YOUNG PERSON STARTS USING MARIJUANA, THE GREATER THE RISKS OF DEVELOPING FUTURE PROBLEMATIC SUBSTANCE USE.

WHAT MAKES YOU HIGH?

It's called tetrahydrocannabinol or THC and it works on the brain. This means it has psychoactive effects. It affects certain parts of the brain that are linked to pain sensations, emotion and movement.



HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

Most people describe a sense of euphoria and they become very relaxed. Often they giggle and laugh a lot and get cravings for certain types of food. Their mouth gets dry and, after a while, they become drowsy. Since sensations are heightened, people often perceive colours as brighter and music as more distinct. Often marijuana will distort the user's sense of time and space. Impaired coordination and balance, a rapid heartbeat, red eyes and dilated pupils may also be immediate effects. These are all indications that marijuana is working on the brain.

Each time a person tries marijuana, the effects may be different, depending on the amount, the potency, the mood a person is in when they use it and the environment in which it is consumed. Also a person can never be sure how long the effects will last.





CAN YOU HAVE A "BAD TRIP"
ON MARIJUANA?



Sometimes people become withdrawn, fearful, anxious or depressed. This happens if the amount you have taken is larger than what you are used to, if the strength of the marijuana is more than what you are used to or if you are an inexperienced user.

IS THERE A SAFE WAY TO USE IT?

Smoking it, whether in a joint or in a bong, is probably the worst way because the smoke has some of the same cancer-causing chemicals found in tobacco. If eaten, it becomes more difficult to control the psychoactive effects. One common mistake is that, because the effects take longer to sink in, a person sometimes becomes impatient or thinks nothing is happening. Then they eat more and a couple of hours later they may really regret doing that.

SO WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Many people maintain that, because marijuana is a plant, it must be harmless. That's not the case. There are physical and psychological health risks as well as safety and legal risks.



PHYSICAL HEALTH RISKS

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

- Some of the more than 400 chemicals in marijuana smoke affect the respiratory system.
- Regular use may cause chronic cough or recurring bronchitis.

MARIJUANA SMOKE HAS MANY OF THE SAME CANCER-CAUSING AGENTS, OR CARCINOGENS, THAT CIGARETTE SMOKE HAS.

- Benzopyrene is a strong carcinogen—and marijuana smoke may contain even more of it than tobacco smoke.

COORDINATION AND BALANCE

- Marijuana lessens coordination and balance.
- Marijuana impairs motor skills.

REPRODUCTION AND PREGNANCY

- Marijuana can lower inhibitions and impair judgment.
- Lower inhibitions can result in unprotected sex, increased possibilities of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.
- Marijuana may interfere with human reproduction—a possible decline in sex hormones in young boys, possible disturbances of the menstrual cycle in girls.

THE USE OF MARIJUANA WITH ALCOHOL IS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE TWO USED SEPARATELY. THE INTOXICATING EFFECTS OF BOTH DRUGS USED AT THE SAME TIME INCREASE IMPAIRMENT. IN THIS CASE 1 + 1 DOES NOT EQUAL 2, BUT MORE LIKE 3 OR 4.

WE KNOW THAT THE EARLY STAGES OF PREGNANCY ARE CRITICAL AND THAT SMOKING MARIJUANA MAY BE HARMFUL TO THE BABY. SOME STUDIES INDICATE THAT MARIJUANA USE BY PREGNANT TEENS MAY CAUSE BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS IN THEIR CHILDREN.

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH RISKS

COGNITIVE EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA USE

- Interferes with your ability to concentrate
- Impairs learning
- Impairs some aspects of memory
- Can affect a person's studies and the quality of their work in school or on the job.

MENTAL HEALTH

In people that are at high risk for schizophrenia, such as those with a family history of the disorder, marijuana use can trigger psychotic episodes. Some research has shown that frequent marijuana use is a risk factor for later depression and anxiety.

PROBLEMATIC SUBSTANCE USE

- Regular high-amount users of marijuana may become dependent, meaning that they do not feel that they can function without marijuana.
- Some marijuana withdrawal symptoms such as cramping and insomnia have been observed.

THE AGE OF FIRST USE IS RELATED TO HIGH CONSUMPTION RATES AND PROBLEM USE LATER IN LIFE. THAT MEANS IF YOU START USING MARIJUANA (OR ANY OTHER SUBSTANCE) AT AN EARLY AGE, YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP PROBLEMS WITH SUBSTANCES IN THE FUTURE.

You don't have to smoke marijuana all the time for it to be considered a problem. For instance, if your use is interfering with obligations at home, school or work, if you are using it alone or in the morning, or if you began use under 14 years of age, consumption may be problematic. If these signs of problematic use exist, they may also be indications that issues or problems beyond marijuana use may need to be resolved.

IF GETTING HIGH IS INTERFERING WITH YOUR OBLIGATIONS AT HOME, WORK OR SCHOOL, IT MAY BE AN INDICATION THAT MARIJUANA USE IS A PROBLEM FOR YOU.

SAFETY RISKS

- Being high impairs judgment, mental and physical ability.
- Marijuana intoxication can pose serious safety risks while riding a bicycle, operating machinery, driving a car or even crossing a busy street.

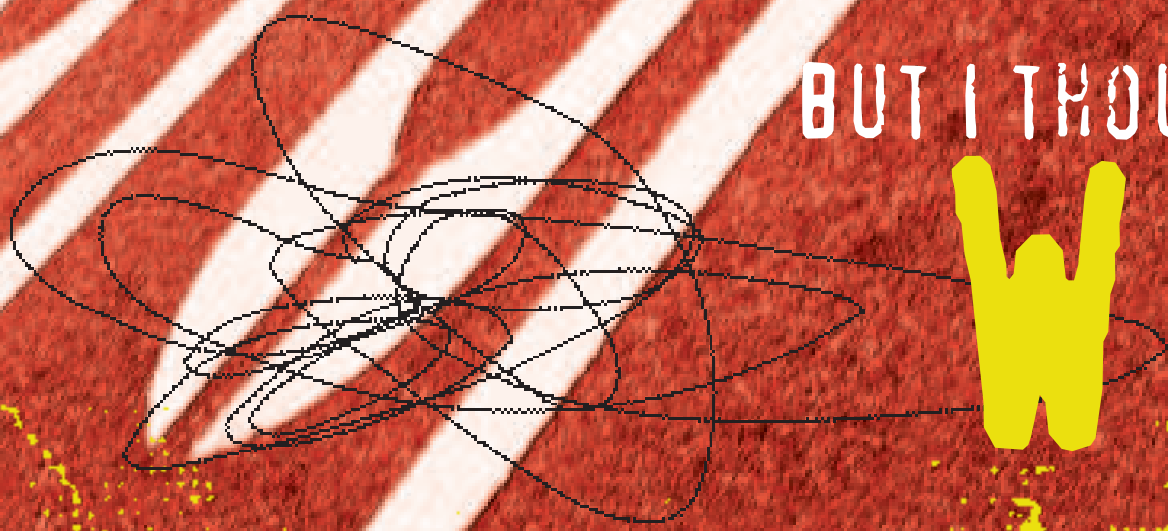
ANY ACTIVITY REQUIRING CONCENTRATION, GOOD JUDGMENT, EYESIGHT, COORDINATION, TIMING, OR FAST REACTIONS, MAY BE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS FOR THOSE WHO ARE HIGH.

THE COMBINED USE OF MARIJUANA AND ALCOHOL, EVEN IN LOW AMOUNTS, HAS BEEN SHOWN TO PRODUCE SEVERE DRIVING IMPAIRMENT AND INCREASE THE RISK OF ACCIDENTS. IN FACT, BEING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ANY SUBSTANCE WHILE DRIVING IS A BAD IDEA. IT'S ALSO CONSIDERED A SERIOUS CRIMINAL OFFENCE.



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LEGAL RISKS

MARIJUANA IS A CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE IN CANADA UNDER THE CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT (COSA). IT IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE TO IMPORT, EXPORT, GROW, POSSESS, SELL, GIVE OR OTHERWISE TRAFFIC MARIJUANA, OR TO POSSESS MARIJUANA FOR THE PURPOSE OF TRAFFICKING. IT IS ALSO AN OFFENCE TO SIMPLY POSSESS MARIJUANA. SUCH OFFENCES COULD RESULT IN A CRIMINAL CONVICTION AND CARRY WITH THEM A CRIMINAL PUNISHMENT.

Convictions for any of these offences may result in a fine and/or imprisonment. A conviction can

- Ruin a person's credibility when they are trying to find a job
- Prevent them from entering certain professions
- Lead to deportation for immigrants and
- Restrict a person's freedom to travel to other countries



GOVERNMENT LEGALIZED MARIJUANA?

NO. MARIJUANA IS, AND WILL REMAIN, ILLEGAL.

Recently, there has been a lot of confusion about the legal status of marijuana in Canada, due in large part to media coverage concerning public debates about changing the offences and penalties related to illegal possession and cultivation of marijuana. Let's settle the issue then: marijuana is, and will remain, illegal. There's only one exception and it's a very clear one: when marijuana is used for medical purposes as authorized under the **Marihuana Medical Access Regulations** (MMAR).

MARIJUANA FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES

Marijuana is not approved as a therapeutic drug in Canada or any country in the world. At present current scientific evidence has not clearly established the safety and efficacy of marijuana when used for medical purposes.

The **Marihuana Medical Access Regulations (MMAR)** provide a framework to allow, under certain circumstances, individuals with serious medical conditions to possess or cultivate marijuana for medical purposes.

Under the MMAR, the support of a doctor is necessary as part of the application process for an authorization to possess marijuana for medical purposes. The MMAR deal exclusively with the medical use of marijuana. Without authorization under the MMAR, persons using marijuana for medical purposes in Canada are breaking the law.

MARIJUANA LAWS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Each country has its own laws regarding drugs—some of them are much more severe than in Canada. Being Canadian doesn't exempt you from those local laws. If you break the law in another country, you are subject to that country's judicial system. If you possess marijuana while travelling, you could end up paying a stiff fine, spending time in jail or possibly even facing the death penalty. Thousands of Canadians are in jail abroad—many of them for drug-related offences. If you use or possess marijuana or other drugs when you travel, then you should familiarize yourself with the laws of foreign countries before you go. To learn more, visit http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/drugs_menu-en.asp.





WHY USE IT?

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TOLD HEALTH CANADA* THEY CHOOSE TO USE MARIJUANA TO

- Have a good time
- Experiment
- Relax
- Relieve boredom
- Cope with problems
- Stimulate creativity
- Be at ease with others
- Be different

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TOLD HEALTH CANADA THEY CHOOSE NOT TO USE MARIJUANA BECAUSE

- Of the health risks
- It's illegal
- Of the psychological effects
- Of the safety risks
- It's a waste of money
- It can have a bad effect on school or future career choices
- It's used to escape problems instead of dealing with them
- It may upset friends and family



IF YOU DON'T USE MARIJUANA,

WHAT THE RESEARCH* WITH YOUTH SAYS

- Two thirds of teens 12-19 years do not try smoking up more than once.
- Less than 3% of teens smoke pot every day.
- 19% of those who have smoked marijuana say they do it out of curiosity; another 19% do it because their friends do it.
- 39% of teens who use marijuana say they smoke it at a friend's house, 19% say they do it at parties, 16% say they do it at a neighbourhood park and 7% of teens say they smoke marijuana at school.
- 88% of teens think it is very dangerous to be in a car if the driver has been smoking marijuana.



YOU WILL NOT BE ALONE.

- 90% of teens say that taking illegal drugs is dangerous or very dangerous.
- 79% of youth say that prolonged use of marijuana will result in worse grades in school.

The rates of use highlighted above are consistent with other recent survey results available at the time of printing. For example, the **Canadian Addiction Survey (2004)** of Canadians 15 years of age and older indicates an increasing trend in marijuana use among youth.



HOW WILL I KNOW THAT I HAVE A PROBLEM?

- YOU WANT TO GET HIGH BEFORE OR WHILE YOU ARE AT SCHOOL.
- YOU ARE SPENDING A LOT OF YOUR MONEY ON MARIJUANA.
- YOU CAN'T REMEMBER THINGS.
- YOU HAVE ENDED THE RELATIONSHIPS YOU HAD WITH THOSE FRIENDS WHO WON'T GET HIGH.
- YOU FEEL SAD OR ANGRY WHEN YOU ARE NOT HIGH.
- YOU ARE SMOKING ALONE.
- YOU ARE GETTING HIGH IN THE MORNING.
- YOU HAVE STOPPED DOING A LOT OF THINGS THAT YOU LIKED TO DO IN THE PAST.
- GETTING HIGH IS INTERFERING WITH YOUR OBLIGATIONS AT HOME, WORK OR SCHOOL.
- YOU ARE CONSTANTLY WAITING TO GET HIGH.
- YOU ARE DRIVING WHILE HIGH.



I THINK I HAVE A PROBLEM
BUT I'M NOT EVEN SURE IF
MARIJUANA IS THE CAUSE OR JUST A
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WHERE DO I GET HELP?

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SYMPTOM.

SOMETIMES PROBLEMS MAY SEEM LESS CHALLENGING IF YOU TALK ABOUT THEM. IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE A PROBLEM AND YOU WOULD LIKE SOME HELP, HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR YOU:

- Discuss your problem with your parents, your family doctor or a counsellor.
- Talk to a nurse, a school counsellor or someone else whom you feel that you can trust.
- Try to cut down on your use of marijuana and see what happens.
- Contact a clinic near you for some anonymous advice.

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION YOU CAN VISIT:

<http://www.drugwise.gc.ca>

ALSO CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING WEB SITES:

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

<http://www.ccsa.ca>

Canadian Health Network

<http://www.canadian-health-network.ca>

ARE YOU READY TO TALK ABOUT MARIJUANA WITH YOUR PARENTS?

In the center of this booklet, we have some activities for you and your parents to try to start the dialogue. Talking about what you think and how you feel helps increase your understanding of marijuana so that you can make healthy decisions.



This publication can also be made available
(in/on computer diskette/large print/audio-cassette/Braille)
upon request.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
OR TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL COPIES,
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