

Common Questions About **MARIJUANA**

ANSWERED BY THE INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE*

Read what the nation's top scientists have concluded about:

- addiction
- progression to harder drugs
- cancer
- mortality
- brain damage
- amotivational syndrome
- "medical" marijuana

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The full report by the National Academy of Sciences can be viewed online at <http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/marimed/>

Q: Is marijuana addictive?

A: "Compared to most other drugs ... dependence among marijuana users is relatively rare." [p. 94]

Drug Category	Proportion Of Users That Ever Became Dependent (%)
Tobacco	32
Alcohol	15
Marijuana (including hashish)	9
Cocaine	17
Heroin	23

[p. 95]

"In summary, although few marijuana users develop dependence, some do. But they appear to be less likely to do so than users of other drugs (including alcohol and nicotine), and marijuana dependence appears to be less severe than dependence on other drugs." [p. 98]

Q: Does marijuana lead to harder drugs?

A: "It does not appear to be a gateway drug to the extent that it is the cause or even that it is the most significant predictor of serious drug abuse; that is, care must be taken not to attribute cause to association." [p. 101]

"There is no evidence that marijuana serves as a stepping stone on the basis of its particular physiological effect." [p. 99]

Q: Is marijuana more dangerous than tobacco?

A: "Given a cigarette of comparable weight, as much as four times the amount of tar can be deposited in the lungs of marijuana smokers as in the lungs of tobacco smokers. ... However, a marijuana cigarette smoked recreationally typically is not packed as tightly as a tobacco cigarette, and the smokable substance is about half that in a tobacco cigarette. In addition, tobacco smokers generally smoke considerably more cigarettes per day than do marijuana smokers." [Pp. 111, 112]

Q: Does marijuana cause cancer?

A: "There is no conclusive evidence that marijuana causes cancer in humans, including cancers usually related to tobacco use." [p. 119]

Q: Does marijuana cause other life-threatening health problems?

A: "Epidemiological data indicate that in the general population marijuana use is not associated with increased mortality." [p. 109]

Q: Is marijuana useless or unnecessary for medical purposes?

A: "Nausea, appetite loss, pain, and anxiety ... all can be mitigated by marijuana. Although some medications are more effective than marijuana for these problems, they are not equally effective in all patients." [p. 159]

Q: Does marijuana cause brain damage?

A: "Earlier studies purporting to show structural changes in the brains of heavy marijuana users have not been replicated with more sophisticated techniques." [p. 106]

Q: Does marijuana cause laziness (a.k.a. "amotivational syndrome")?

A: "When heavy marijuana use accompanies these symptoms, the drug is often cited as the cause, but no convincing data demonstrate a causal relationship between marijuana smoking and these behavioral characteristics." [Pp. 107, 108]

Q: Do criminal penalties deter marijuana use?

A: "There is little evidence that decriminalization of marijuana use necessarily leads to a substantial increase in marijuana use." [p. 104]
