

Marijuana Addiction & Treatment

Marijuana is the most commonly abused drug in the United States. It is comprised of a dry, shredded green/brown mix of flowers, stems, seeds, and leaves of the plant *Cannabis sativa*. It is usually smoked as a cigarette (joint) or in a pipe (bong or bowl). It is also smoked in a blunt, which is a cigar that has been emptied of tobacco and refilled with marijuana, sometimes in combination with another drug. Marijuana can also be mixed in food or brewed as tea. In its more concentrated, resinous form, marijuana is known as hashish, and as a sticky, black liquid, hash oil. The main active chemical in marijuana is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol).

Effects of Marijuana

Membranes in certain nerve cells in the brain contain protein receptors that bind to THC. Once the membranes and the THC bind together, the THC kicks off a series of cellular reactions that ultimately lead to the high that users experience when they smoke marijuana. When smoked, the effects of marijuana occur immediately after the drug enters the brain and last 1 to 3 hours. If consumed in food or drink, the effects begin more slowly and last longer. Smoking marijuana puts more THC in the bloodstream than eating or drinking the drug. Short-term effects can also include increased heart rate, relaxed bronchial passages, and more. Users may also experience pleasant sensations, colors and sounds, or the user may experience sleepiness and/or depression. Users can also experience anxiety, fear, panic and distrust.

Lasting/Long-Term Effects

Long-term use of marijuana can lead to respiratory problems, similar to those of tobacco smokers. Cancer of the respiratory tract and lungs can also be an effect of smoking marijuana. Marijuana smoke contains 50 to 70 percent more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke. Short-term memory loss can also occur over time, as THC alters the way that information is processed by the hippocampus, the brain area responsible for memory formation. Marijuana can also significantly impair and effect critical skills related to attention, memory and learning.

Prolonged periods of use can lead to marijuana addiction. Users become physically and mentally dependent upon marijuana, making it necessary to seek treatment