

Marijuana and Mental Health

Too Many Misconceptions



As marijuana becomes increasingly legalized in the United States, the need for high-quality, long-term studies grows more and more necessary. While popular and widespread ideas say marijuana is a harmless, natural drug that can help people cope with anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, existing scientific studies contradict these misconceptions. In fact, a recent study from *The Lancet* found that, despite popular use to help with mental struggles, cannabinoids do little to improve mental health conditions, including the following¹:

- Depression
- ADD
- PTSD
- Anxiety
- Tourette's
- Psychosis

Not only is there little to no evidence that marijuana helps these conditions, heavy and long-term use can do damage to your mental health. The Center for Disease Control found that frequent and long-term cannabis use was associated with²:

- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Suicidal thoughts
- Development of Schizophrenia

In young people, suicidal thoughts were not where the risk stopped. Large, long-running studies have shown that regular marijuana use before the age of 17 significantly increases the risk of suicide attempt².

Marijuana as a Coping Mechanism for Depression and Anxiety

Many young people and adults use marijuana recreationally to help them relax and unwind. While this practice is so commonplace as to seem harmless, recent studies have shown that marijuana use may offer a temporary relief from anxiety and stress, but, over time, it makes depression worse. Baseline symptoms of depression are exacerbated as users continue to treat stress and anxiety with the drug³.

Marijuana Before, Marijuana Now

The gradual legalization of marijuana has produced many changes. Scientists are able to study the drug and its effects more easily, which will inform and educate Americans in the coming decades.

However, with legalization, manufacturers can now make the drug exponentially stronger. In the 1970s, THC—the psychoactive ingredient—was normally about 3%, whereas now it can be anywhere between 12% to 30%. Oil that you rub on your skin can have up to a 100% THC level.

Levels this high are extremely dangerous. They can cause psychotic events and permanent mental damage.

Studies have found direct associations between how much a user ingests, how regularly they ingest it, how strong the THC is, and how likely the user is to develop mental health issues. These often begin with depression and anxiety but can develop into addiction and psychosis, and even include suicidal thoughts and attempts³.

That's right: the more you use it to help yourself feel better, the more at risk of feeling worse you become.

Is Marijuana Addictive?

With marijuana stronger than ever before, the idea that it isn't addictive is false. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration states that roughly 10% of people who use marijuana will become addicted. Users who begin in adolescence see an increased risk: one out of six will become addicted⁴.

Heavy cannabis users show clear withdrawal symptoms when they attempt to quit, and brain scans demonstrate changes in the brain's reward center that are consistent with addiction⁴.

Even worse, there is evidence that cannabis can act as a gateway drug. A study published in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* that included over 30,000 participants found that cannabis use appeared to increase the risk of developing an addiction to non-medical opioids⁵.

About This Campaign

Because much of the public conversation surrounding marijuana has been based on anecdotes rather than science, Prevention Action Alliance and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services created this campaign to help people better understand the facts about marijuana and its effects.

If you found this article helpful, we encourage you to share it with others. You can also find other fact sheets about marijuana at: preventionactionalliance.org/marijuana

If you have concerns about your own use of marijuana or a loved one's, and wish to seek help, go to: findtreatment.samhsa.gov/

Contact Us

For more information on Marijuana, Pregnancy, and Breastfeeding, please contact us at:

Prevention Action Alliance
(614) 540-9985
preventionactionalliance.org

About Us

Prevention
Action Alliance



Prevention Action Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit in Columbus, Ohio dedicated to leading healthy communities in both the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health awareness. Learn more about Prevention Action Alliance at preventionactionalliance.org.

The mission of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (Ohio MHAS) is to provide statewide leadership on the topics of mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery. Learn more about Ohio MHAS at mha.ohio.gov

1. [thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(19\)30401-8/fulltext](http://thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(19)30401-8/fulltext)
2. cdc.gov/marijuana/nas/mental-health.html
3. learnaboutsam.org/the-issues/marijuana-mental-health/
4. samhsa.gov/marijuana
5. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28946762/