

What Marijuana Does to the Body

Head-to-Toe Effects



Marijuana is a psychoactive drug that contains mind-altering compounds, including tetrahydrocannabinol or THC. Many people experience a high when using marijuana, though the experience is not the same for everyone. The marijuana high is, in fact, one of the most unpredictable of all intoxicating substances effects.

In general, marijuana intoxication may include feelings of relaxation followed by higher levels of anxiety, altered sensory perception, changes in mood, exaggerated mental state, and either increased or decreased levels of creativity.¹

Having a heightened sense of hearing or taste is another intoxication effect with many users reporting a greater appreciation for music while high. Others tell of “having the munchies,” which involves binge eating and/or eating foods in unusual combinations.

Factors Affecting Cannabis High

Though many of the effects of marijuana are similar from person to person, individual sensitivities and other factors can impact how the drug affects someone. Variables that affect the experience can include:^{1,2,3,4}

- Age, weight, gender
- Environment
- Genetics (tolerance, metabolism, biology)
- How the drug is ingested (smoking, vaping, edibles)
- Interaction with other medications
- Previous experience with marijuana or other drugs
- Quality and potency of the product
- Quantity ingested
- State of mind and feelings about others at the time of use
- Strain or subspecies of the plant

Timeline of Physical Effects

Here are some of the general physical effects a person will feel when inhaling marijuana.^{5,6} Individual experience will vary.

2-3 min

Heart rate speeds up; bronchial passages relax; eyes begin to look bloodshot

30 min-3 hrs

Euphoric, relaxed feeling (some people feel the opposite – anxious, afraid or panicked); increased appetite; slower reaction time, altered senses such as brighter colors and louder sounds; lowered inhibitions

Coming down from the high

Fatigue; brain fog; headache; nausea; feeling a little anxious or depressed

Mental Function

The feeling of euphoria is one of the reasons many people use marijuana in the first place. Not everyone experiences those feelings though. Much like the intoxicating effects of alcohol, marijuana can leave a person feeling anxious, paranoid, upset, slowed down, or confused.

The rebound effect of marijuana can, in some people, lead to even higher levels of anxiety. Some people may even develop long-term anxiety disorders and, in an attempt to self-medicate with marijuana, set themselves up for an endless and harmful loop.

Because it is a mind- and mood-altering substance, rarely does marijuana improve mental functioning.

Head-to-Toe Effects

Most of marijuana's effects are short-term. Some, however, are long-term while others can even be permanent. Known effects include:⁷

PHYSICAL	MENTAL	SYSTEMIC
Digestive issues	Altered sense of time	Affected brain development in teens
Dry mouth and eyes	Delusions	Affected fetal development
Glaucoma relief	Hallucinations	Affected tumor growth
Increased phlegm	Memory problems	Breathing problems
Less vomiting or nausea (or conversely feeling sick or faint)	Mood changes	Increased risk for heart attack
Rapid heartbeat	Psychosis	Pain relief
Red eyes	Slowed reaction time	Weakened immune system
Stinging or burning in mouth or throat and lung irritation	Trouble thinking or problem solving	Worsening of respiratory issues

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, 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 located in Columbus, Ohio. We're dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Learn more at preventionactionalliance.org.

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

1. verywellmind.com/what-does-a-marijuana-high-feel-like-22303
2. medicalnewstoday.com/articles/327270#the-stages-of-being-high
3. cdc.gov/marijuana/faqs/affects-of-marijuana.html
4. thefreshtoast.com/cannabis/understanding-the-timeline-of-a-marijuana-high/

5. teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/marijuana#topic-3
6. webmd.com/mental-health/addiction/marijuana-use-and-its-effects#1
7. medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324948/#physical-health