

An Update of the Effects of Cannabis on Health

A recent publication outlines a number of important questions concerning adverse effects of marijuana on health. Dr. Harold Kalant, of the University of Toronto, offers an excellent review of the literature on health effects of marijuana. The principal findings, according to Dr. Kalant, are as follows:

- ◆ The potential role of cannabis in traffic accidents is supported by data showing the presence of THC in the blood and saliva of injured or impaired drivers with a higher frequency than probably occurs in the general public or in non-injured, non-impaired drivers.
- ◆ The frequency of chronic bronchial inflammatory changes and precancerous alterations in the bronchial epithelium of long-term heavy smokers of cannabis has been clearly demonstrated and there may be a causal role of cannabis smoking in upper airways cancer in young adults.
- ◆ The possibility of a contribution of cannabis smoking to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is still not clear.
- ◆ Much new information indicates a substantial involvement of cannabis use in various psychiatric disorders, including schizophrenic relapse, major depression, anxiety or panic disorders, and behavioral disorders in young people. There is stronger evidence to suggest that cannabis use contributes to the production of these disorders than there is that these disorders contribute to cannabis use.
- ◆ There is evidence to support the idea that regular heavy use of cannabis by young adolescents is causally linked to poor psychosocial outcomes.

- ◆ There is good, but still not conclusive, evidence of the occurrence of what appears to be a withdrawal syndrome that impairs the ability to stop use in a significant proportion of cases.
- ◆ A small number of case reports suggest that cannabis use may, under certain circumstances, increase the risk of potentially serious cardiovascular disorders in predisposed individuals.
- ◆ Independent new data are consistent with the earlier evidence that maternal use of cannabis during pregnancy may give rise to subtle but significant developmental problems in the offspring, detectable in early school years and adolescence.

For further information, please see, “*Adverse effects of cannabis on health: An update of the literature since 1996*” in the journal Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry, 2004, Volume 28, pages 849-863

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