

MSA NEWSLINE

Up-to-date Information on Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development



Long-Term Marijuana Users May Experience Withdrawal



What is marijuana?

- ◆ It is a green, brown, or gray mixture of dried, shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers of the hemp plant.

How is marijuana used?

- ◆ It is usually smoked as a cigarette (called a joint or a nail) or in a pipe or bong.

How many teens smoke marijuana?

- ◆ Fewer than one in four high school students use marijuana.

Why do young people use marijuana?

- ◆ Many reasons such as seeing family members or friends using it, peer pressure, advertisements portraying marijuana use as cool, and to help escape from problems.

What happens if you smoke marijuana?

- ◆ Some people feel nothing, while others feel relaxed.
- ◆ Some users get thirsty or hungry.
- ◆ Some users get bad effects from marijuana such as anxiety and paranoid thoughts.

Unpleasant Symptoms May Contribute to Continued Marijuana Abuse

Two studies have been performed that suggest that long-term marijuana users may experience withdrawal symptoms. The symptoms that researchers are focusing on are mostly behavioral including anxiety, irritability, and aggression. Experts believe that to avoid the unpleasant experiences associated with abstinence people may continue to abuse the substance.

A study conducted by Dr. Elena Kouri and her colleagues tested the behavioral differences between long-term heavy marijuana users and infrequent users once they abstained. The regular users had smoked marijuana at least 5000 times in their life or the equivalent of smoking once a day for 13 years; the occasional smokers had only smoked 50 times or less in their life, or had smoked daily at one time but not more than once a week in the past three months. The subjects had to refrain from marijuana use for 28 days, which was monitored by conducting urinalysis.

Researchers in this study were concerned with measures of aggression. In order to measure aggression, the researchers used a computerized test which monitored motor skills and other physiological features. Aggression was measured the first day of the study and then again after one, three, seven, and 28 days of abstinence.

The results revealed that the regular users of marijuana had significantly more aggressive responses after one, three, and seven days of abstinence. On days three and seven, this group scored more than twice as many aggressive responses than the group of infrequent users. On the twenty-eighth day, there was no significant difference between the two groups. The subjects did not display any aggressive behavior outside of the laboratory, which suggests that this may only occur in a testing situation. However, it is concluded that withdrawal from regular use is associated with certain temporary aggressive traits.

As mentioned before, there are other behavioral and physical traits that are thought to coincide with abstinence. A study conducted by Dr. Haney and colleagues looked at the effects of abstinence on 12 adult male subjects who smoked marijuana with THC concentrations

What are the short-term effects of marijuana?

- ◆ Problems with memory and learning, distorted perception, trouble with thinking and problemsolving, loss of motor coordination, and increased heart rate.

What are the long-term effects of marijuana use?

- ◆ Marijuana use may play a role in some kinds of cancer and in problems with respiratory and immune systems.

Can people become addicted to marijuana?

- ◆ Yes

-Information obtained from NIDA;

Marijuana: Facts for Teens

of 1.8 percent or 3.1 percent, or they were given marijuana cigarettes to smoke that had no active THC. These concentration levels were controlled in the laboratory. All subjects smoked marijuana with no active THC for the first four days of the study, and were then given low, high, or no concentration marijuana on alternating four-day periods. The subjects completed a 50- item checklist three times a day which measured certain physical conditions as well as behavioral states.

The results showed that abstinence from low and high concentrations revealed decreased scores in "hunger", "friendliness", and "anxiety." The high concentration group also demonstrated a development of tolerance. It is highly possible that these unpleasant symptoms contribute to continued marijuana abuse. Dr. Haney feels that in order to develop better treatment protocols, we must take the findings into consideration.

-Information recieved from Volume 15, Number 1 of NIDA NOTES

For further information regarding this article please contact Lauen Gilmore at the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 1256 Briarcliff Road, N.E., Suite 324W, Atlanta, Georgia, 30306. You can also phone us at 404-712-9800 or visit our website at <http://www.emory.edu/MSACD>

NEWSLINE Editor: Jaclyn M. Cheek

Contributing Author: Lauren Gilmore



Maternal Substance Abuse and
Child Development Project
1256 Briarcliff Rd., NE Suite 323W
Emory West Campus
Atlanta, GA 30306

The Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project is funded in part by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases.