



Helping Hands



The Effects of Marijuana

Changes in marijuana policies across states legalizing marijuana for medical and/or recreational use suggest that marijuana is gaining greater acceptance in our society. Thus, it is particularly important for people to understand what is known about both the adverse health effects and the potential therapeutic benefits linked to marijuana.

Because marijuana impairs short-term memory, judgment and distorts perception, it can impair performance in school or at work and make it dangerous to drive an automobile. It also affects brain systems that are still maturing through young adulthood, so regular use by teens may have a negative and long-lasting effect on their cognitive development, putting them at a competitive disadvantage and possibly interfering with their well-being in other ways. Contrary to popular belief, marijuana can be addictive, and its use during adolescence may make other forms of drug abuse or addiction more likely.

Whether smoking or otherwise consuming marijuana has therapeutic benefits that outweigh its health risks is still an open question that science has not resolved. Although many states now permit dispensing marijuana for medicinal purposes and there is mounting anecdotal evidence for the efficacy of marijuana-derived compounds, there are currently no FDA-approved indications for "medical marijuana." However, safe medicines based on cannabinoid chemicals derived from the marijuana plant have been available for decades and more are being developed. This report is intended as a useful summary of what the most up-to-date science has to say about marijuana and its effects on those who use it—both young and old.



Marijuana, Memory, and the Hippocampus

Brain imaging reveals high levels of cannabinoid receptors in many areas, including the cortex, hippocampus, cerebellum, and nucleus accumbens (ventral striatum). The following affects are due to THC: Memory impairment from marijuana use occurs because THC alters how information is processed in the hippocampus, a brain area responsible for memory formation. Most of the evidence supporting this assertion comes from animal studies. For example, rats exposed to THC in utero, soon after birth, or during adolescence, show notable problems with specific learning/memory tasks later in life. Moreover, cognitive impairment in adult rats is associated with structural and functional changes in the hippocampus from THC exposure during adolescence.



As people age, they lose neurons in the hippocampus, which decreases their ability to learn new information. Chronic THC exposure may hasten age-related loss of hippocampal neurons.

While there are numerous effects of THC that are clear, there are many that are not. Performance impairment is generally acknowledged in regular users. Because of this, many companies have policies that prohibit employees from being under the influence of THC. All state laws that allow any type of marijuana usage are written so that company policies prohibiting the use of any THC product take priority over the law. In other words, if your company has a policy prohibiting employees from being under the influence of any THC product (as evidenced by a positive drug test), that policy "trumps" the legalized usage law, and you cannot use any THC products.

Myths about Mental Health (excerpts from mendthemind.ca)

Myth: Mental illness is a single, rare disorder.

Reality: Anxiety, mood, personality, addiction and impulse control disorders are all different categories of very different mental illnesses, each with its own features and underlying causes. Each mental illness is a variation on the theme of brain chemistry gone awry, affecting things like mood and perception. Each has its own specific causes, features and approaches to treatment.

Myth: People with a mental illness never get better.

Reality: TREATMENT WORKS! Treatments for mental illnesses are more numerous and sophisticated than ever. Researchers continue to discover new treatments. Due to these advances, many people can and do recover from mental illness.

Myth: Mental health problems do not affect children or youth. Problems they have are just part of growing up.

Reality: 1 in 5 children and youth struggle with their mental health. 70% of adult mental illness begins during childhood or adolescence, including: depression, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder and anxiety disorders. However, 79% of youth who receive help improve significantly with treatment, which lasts less than 12 sessions for 66% of them.

Myth: Depression is a character flaw and people should just 'snap out of it'.

Reality: Research shows that depression has nothing to do with being lazy or weak. It results from changes in brain chemistry or brain function. Therapy and/or medication help people to recover.

Myth: Addiction is a lifestyle choice and shows a lack of willpower.

Reality: Addictions involve complex factors including genetics, the environment, and other underlying psychiatric conditions.

IAM Peer Employee Assistance Program



The heart and soul of the District 141 Employee Assistance Program are your local lodge EAP peer coordinators. These dedicated men and women volunteer their personal time to assist other union members and their families who are experiencing personal difficulties. EAP coordinators do not make clinical diagnoses or clinical evaluations. They are trained to make a basic assessment of your situation and refer you to an appropriate resource for a more detailed evaluation. EAP coordinators will follow up to ensure you have been able to access services that address the difficulty you are experiencing. Your IAM EAP resource is listed below. Please call



METHODS TO REDUCE MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

1. Know the facts:

Educate yourself about mental health problems. Learn the facts



2. Be aware of your attitudes and behavior:

We've all grown up with prejudices and judgmental thinking. See people as unique human beings, not as labels or stereotypes.

3. Choose your words carefully:

The way we speak can affect the way other people think and speak.

4. Educate others:

Find opportunities to pass on facts and positive attitudes about people with mental health problems.

5. Focus on the positive:

People with mental health and substance use problems make valuable contributions to society. Recognize their contribution.

6. Support people:

Treat people who have mental health problems with dignity and respect. Encourage anyone dealing with a mental illness or substance abuse issue in their efforts to get well.

7. Include everyone:

Discuss these issues with all of your friends to help reduce the stigma.

