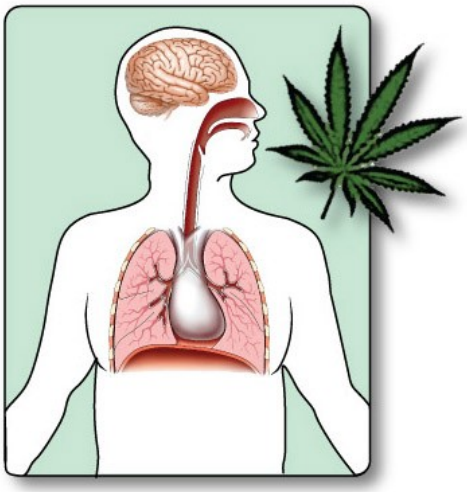
Marijuana Abuse and Chemical Dependency

WHEN IS DRUG USE A PROBLEM?

Problems related to drug use usually begin with **abuse** of the substance and lead to **dependency**.

Abuse is repeated use of a drug with recurrent and significant negative consequences. Abuse happens anytime drug use is interfering with normal living activities including:

- Failure to fulfill major obligations at work, school or home (poor work performance, missing work or school and/or neglecting children and home).
- Engaging in activities that are physically dangerous (driving a car or doing recreational activities such as swimming or rock climbing) while under the effects of the drug.
- Recurrent drug-related legal problems (arrests for disorderly conduct or assault and battery).
- Recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or increased by the effects of the drug (arguments with family or friends, or physical fights).



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Dependency has two parts.

1. You first develop an emotional/psychological dependence. Psychological dependence develops when your mind tells you that the drug is needed. You come to believe it helps you cope with life.
2. This is usually followed by physical dependence which has developed when continuing increases of drugs are required to get the same feeling or "high." This may result in:
   - Withdrawal symptoms such as shakes or tremors.
   - The substance being over a longer period of time than intended.
   - An ongoing desire, or unsuccessful effort to, cut down or control the use.
   - Greater amounts of time spent getting the drug, using the drug or recovering from the effects of the drug.
   - Important social, work or interests and activities are given up or reduced because or drug use.
   - Substance is used despite knowledge of ongoing physical (ulcers) or psychological (depression) problems.

SIGNS OF CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY:

- Friends or family say there is a problem.
- Fighting when using drugs.
- Having blackouts (not remembering what you do while using).
- Feel sick from using drugs but continue using.
- Lie about use or amounts of drugs used.
- Need drugs to get you going.
- Need drugs to relate to people or feel comfortable in social situations.
- Use drugs to forget problems.

A "yes" answered to any of the above signs of chemical dependency indicates there are problems. The **longer the use** of drugs continues, **the greater the problems** will become.

If there is a family history of drug or alcohol use it is **best not to experiment** with drugs. Experimentation **leads to tolerance**. Addiction is followed by dependency where drugs are now needed not just to get high but to feel normal.

Addiction cannot be cured but it can be stopped. This often requires outside help and the care of professionals. Treatment centers are listed in the yellow pages under: Cocaine, Narcotics, and Alcoholics anonymous. Most hospitals and clinics can refer you to a specialized care center.

WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana is a plant which grows wild all over the world. The plant contains many chemicals but the active ingredient of the plant is THC (*tetrahydrocannabinol*). This is responsible for the "high" perceived by people using the drug.

HOW IS MARIJUANA USED?

Marijuana is smoked, eaten in brownies or any other food, and drank as a tea.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA?

Marijuana is a nervous system **depressant** which slows the thinking process. Because of this effect, users think marijuana has a calming effect. Actually what happens is the air carrying tubules in the lung become relaxed and allow more oxygen to enter. This causes the user to feel high. The blood pressure falls so less blood reaches the brain and the heart speeds up. As the effects wear off the user becomes depressed. Some people become very paranoid during use. They feel as though people are out to get them. Periodic use can interfere with performance at school or work. Generally Marijuana use does not develop into a physical dependence, but it is very habit forming. Marijuana is also seen as a gateway to use of harder drugs.

Strong habits such as using Marijuana, as with all drugs and addictions, can only be helped by stopping use of all chemicals. This is hard but may save your life.

OTHER HEALTH RISKS OF MARIJUANA AND DRUG USE ARE:

- The increased possibility of getting AIDS or hepatitis (liver inflammation).

HOW TO STAY DRUG FREE ONCE YOU HAVE QUIT USING:

- Develop healthy activities and form friends who do not use drugs.
- Stay away from the drug scene.
- Tell the those who want you to use drugs you have other, better things to do.
- Have ready excuses available about why you cannot use.
- Attend 12-Step Meetings for support from other recovering people.

FOR MORE HELP OR INFORMATION CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CAREGIVER, CLINIC, HOSPITAL OR DIAL 1-800-MARIJUANA (1-800-627-4582).

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