

Clearing the Air about Marijuana Use

It seems like everyone is talking about marijuana.

Public discussions about legalization of marijuana (cannabis) may have led people to believe that this drug is harmless. Ontario's doctors want to provide clarity on some of the myths associated with use of marijuana, particularly for youth. Before using, be informed of the risks.

MYTH: Marijuana isn't that bad for you.

FACT: Recreational marijuana is associated with a number of negative health risks and is an inherently harmful substance. The health risks caused by recreational marijuana can best be avoided by abstaining from use.

MYTH: Marijuana isn't addictive.

FACT: Canadian youth are among top users of marijuana in the Western world. Using marijuana when you are a teenager and your brain is still developing can lead to physical and emotional impacts as well as substance dependence.

MYTH: It's just fun, and there are no real negative effects of using marijuana.

FACT: Users of marijuana can develop cannabis (marijuana) use disorder. Symptoms of this disorder include tolerance and withdrawal, which are also seen in other addictive substances such as alcohol and tobacco. Marijuana withdrawal includes irritability, anger or aggression, anxiety, depressed mood, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, decreased appetite, and weight loss.

MYTH: Marijuana helps anxiety issues.

FACT: Marijuana use can have harmful effects on the mental health of some at risk individuals, and generally harmful effects on most users. It has been found to contribute to anxiety and depression by increasing the negative feelings associated with these conditions. Evidence suggests that using marijuana during teenage years is linked to the development of mood and anxiety disorders.

MYTH: It's okay to use marijuana when you are young, it impacts people of all ages the same way.

FACT: There is strong evidence that shows marijuana impacts brain development. We know that the brain continues to develop through early adulthood, until the age of 25.

MYTH: Smoking marijuana isn't as bad as smoking Tobacco.

FACT: No matter what, smoking harms your respiratory tract. Tar from a marijuana cigarette harms the lungs, and smoking it increases your chance of respiratory diseases, including lung cancer.

MYTH: Marijuana doesn't cause any long term harm to the body.

FACT: Smoking marijuana is known to have negative effects on cognition. Effects include difficulties with attention, problem solving and impaired judgement, decision-making and ability to learn.

MYTH: Using marijuana and then driving isn't as bad as using alcohol and driving.

FACT: While the effects of marijuana are different from alcohol, it similarly impairs reaction times and the ability to concentrate on the road. When a person consumes marijuana, his/her heart rate increases, short-term memory is impaired, and attention, motor skills, reaction time, and the organization of complex information are all reduced. All of these impacts are crucial for driving a motor vehicle.

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