

MARIJUANA

The miracle cure-all?



Illustration by Steve Barnecut

The Facts: What, how and why

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(The Gauntlet)

Research has shown marijuana to be one of the safest drugs known to medicine today--it is much less dangerous than alcohol. Yet, since Canada banned marijuana in 1923, the government has spent billions of dollars each year combating the production, sale and use of marijuana.

Some of marijuana's bad reputation has to do with certain myths--such as smoking marijuana can drive a person completely insane. True? No, but there are negative aspects.

Marijuana has a mellowing effect. The user often feels tranquillity and experiences an enhancement of the perceptions. Abe Wiebe, an addictions counsellor for AADAC (Alcohol And Drug Action Committee), describes the marijuana effects as a "removal of reality" and says that "a long term use of marijuana can produce a loss of ambition called amotivational syndrome."

Although most users feel relaxed and peaceful, others may feel anxiety, depression, irritability, nausea, fear, headaches, backaches and dizziness. Less common symptoms may include paranoia, disorientation and suspiciousness; however, many of these symptoms depend on the user's mood when smoking marijuana. The presence of another drug, such as alcohol, may also be a factor.

Driving a car or operating machinery can be dangerous since marijuana affects your coordination, judgement, and ability to focus accurately.

Healthwise, smoking marijuana may increase a person's chance for heart disease and lung cancer, since a marijuana joint contains twice as much tar as a cigarette and a greater concentration of cancer-causing materials. The respiratory system may also be severely damaged because marijuana smokers inhale deeply and hold the smoke in their lungs longer than cigarette smokers.

Damage to the reproduction system of both men and women may occur with heavy use. As well, a pregnant woman may experience difficulties with her pregnancy and harm the fetus.

Yet for centuries, people from all over the world have been using cannabis (another name for marijuana) not only as an intoxicant, but as a source of food, medicine, rope and linen.

The cannabis hemp seed contains the highest amount of essential amino acids and fatty acids of any plant. These fatty acids help maintain our immune system, which may prevent heart disease and most cancers, since these diseases are now believed to result from fatty degeneration caused by the large intake of saturated fats. According to some health experts, these properties of marijuana mean "that super health and the possibility of feeding the world is at our fingertips."