

If you choose to use marijuana

How to reduce your risk

- Marijuana is illegal under federal law. Recreational and/or medical use is illegal in most states. Being identified as a marijuana user can limit your opportunities and land you in legal trouble. Be aware of the dangers associated with possessing an illegal drug.
- Define what benefits you want from marijuana. Do not use it just because others do, because it is available, or in an attempt to address recurrent stress or anxiety.
- The effects of marijuana (or any drug) are highly variable. The effects depend on its potency, the method of delivery, and how it is used (where, why, how often, etc.)
- Infrequent, moderate consumption of lower-potency marijuana (e.g., several hits from a joint once or twice a week) is probably not more harmful than low-risk alcohol use (e.g., a couple of beers twice a week). Frequent, heavy marijuana use is clearly harmful. Edibles and resins are riskier because of increased potency and the difficulty of controlling the dosage.
- Remember that it can be dangerous to drive, operate machinery, or engage in risky activities under the influence of marijuana. The drug can cause illusions of time and space.
- If marijuana gives you effects that you enjoy, you will need to take precautions if you want to keep enjoying them. Set limits on your use. For example, use only with certain friends, only on weekends, or only when you have no work to do. The more situations in which you allow yourself to use, the more likely you are to become dependent. Remember that marijuana has residual effects on learning and memory for several days after use.
- If you find the effects you like from marijuana becoming less intense or disappearing altogether, *stop using it*. You can resume after a break. Less is more—and you can easily prove that to yourself. The trick is to keep frequency of use below the level where you become insensitive to marijuana's interesting effects on consciousness. The worst thing you can do is use more frequently or try more potent forms. That will exacerbate the problem.
- Be careful about combining marijuana with alcohol and/or other psychoactive drugs.
- Be careful about where you use and who with, especially if trying marijuana for the first time. Our tolerance for marijuana (and alcohol and other psychoactive substances) declines when we are in unfamiliar situations or with unfamiliar people.
- If you find that you are using marijuana more than you want and are not getting useful effects from it, consider the possibility that it is controlling you more than you are controlling it. Try to do without it for a while. If you can't, you may need outside help in breaking the habit.

Adapted from Dr. Andrew Weil's guidelines (From *Chocolate to Morphine*, Mariner Books, 2004) with input from the medical directors and Professional Advisory Board of *Student Health 101* and reference to medical and scientific literature (2016).

