Marijuana (also known as pot, reefer, mary jane, weed, grass, plus many more) is a hallucinogen that is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States. The word marijuana refers to the leaves, stems and flowering tops of the cannabis plant, Cannibus sativa. It can be eaten, inhaled, or smoked, with the most common way of use is by smoking in a joint or blunt. The only medically used form of marijuana is in dronabinol (Marinol®), which contains only the ingredient tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which is the primary active ingredient in marijuana that affects mood and behavior. Marinol’s approved use is for chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting and has also been shown to help with symptoms of glaucoma, a disease that affects the eyes. Marijuana bought on the street contains other ingredients in addition to THC.

So how does it work?
When marijuana is smoked the THC, which causes the main mind-altering effects of marijuana, rapidly enters the bloodstream through the lungs. It is then carried to several organs including the brain, the heart, and the eyes. Once in the brain, THC then connects to certain receptors on nerve cells causing the release of a chemical, dopamine.

What happens when Marijuana is mixed with....
Alcohol?
• It is possible that the effects of marijuana mixed with alcohol are additive. Since both are CNS depressants, it is possible that the effects of THC in high doses may be increased when used with alcohol.
• Since both alcohol and marijuana affect the mind by altering perception, mood, and behavior, use together can cause loss of inhibition (such as shyness and embarrassment) more than either alone.
• Use of both together can impair driving performance much more than either drug alone, resulting in worsened reaction time or ability to recognize other drivers.

What if you take Marijuana while you are pregnant?
It has been shown that children of women who use marijuana during pregnancy are overly irritated to visual surroundings, have increased trembling and a high pitched cry. These are indications that there are developmental disabilities in the child.

Is there a chance this substance could contain contaminants if it is obtained “on the street”? If so, what are the effects of these contaminants?
• There is a possibility of getting marijuana that contains fecal matter, or microorganisms which can cause harmful infections
• Unlike cigarettes, marijuana doesn’t contain any nicotine, but it does contain many cancer causing substances. It has a much larger amount of tar than cigarettes. To make it even worse, marijuana smoke is not filtered like cigarette smoke is.

Short term effects of taking Marijuana
Can begin in as little as a few minutes and can last up to six hours.

Judgment
• Can result in short term euphoria (“high”) followed by depression and sleepiness
• Can result in hallucinations, delusions, anxiety
• Can cause an increase in appetite (often known as “the munchies”)

Memory
• Can impair the ability to form and recall memories
• Can impair the ability to shift attention from one thing to another
• Can cause disorientation
• Use is associated with poor performance in school

Health
• Can cause an increase in heart rate, difficulty breathing, dilation of the eyes, and dry mouth
• Can increase the difficulty to quit smoking tobacco
• Can decrease coordination and balance

Long term effects of taking Marijuana
Can occurs for up to 24 hours after use, and in some people up to 1 week after last use

Judgment
• Can result in depression, anxiety, increased aggression

Memory
• Has been shown to cause poor performance in school and work
• Inability to recall information

Health
• Can lead to addiction with continued use
• Increases the risk of chronic cough and lung disease such as emphysema or bronchitis
• Can result in a weakened immune system
• Can increase the risk of certain cancers of the head, neck, and lungs

References

For more information contact the Student Health Center at 348.3878