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# THE VSAAC VIEW

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## Can Marijuana Really be Medicine?

There have been discussions by state legislators all across the United States trying to decide if marijuana should be legalized and considered medicine. Many states have legalized the substance and have allowed dispensaries, run by lay citizens, to dole out the drugs. A doctor's prescription is supposed to be necessary, but dispensaries, to date, are generally not monitored by police or medical facility.

These discussions are confusing to the general population, and to youth, in particular. If marijuana can be used as medicine, then it must be ok! Not so! Let's be very clear, **smoking** crude marijuana is not medicinal. We all agree that smoking tobacco is the cause of many, many illnesses and millions of deaths. Marijuana smoke contains 50 –70 % more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke, and therefore, more dangerous than tobacco smoke. Marijuana, derived from the cannabis plant is known to contain 483 components from 18 different chemical classes. It is not known exactly how all of these chemicals interact with each other and with the human body when ingested.

There is no question that there are substances in marijuana, THC (tetrahydrocannabinol and CBD cannabidiol, that have shown to be effective in treating some symptoms of some diseases. For example researchers from the Global Neuroscience Initiative Foundation reviewed published research studies and concluded that the **extracts** of THC and CBD were effective treatments for MS symptoms but that there were side effects. No where in this report or any other scientific reports do scientists say that smoking marijuana is good for the overall health of an individual.

## QUICK FACTS

- ? Marijuana use has crept up to use levels of five years ago ([jointogether.org](http://jointogether.org))
- ? The belief that smoking marijuana poses serious risk has decreased. ([jointogether.org](http://jointogether.org))
- ? Teen smoking as seen a slight decline over the last year but use of smokeless tobacco products may be on the rise. ([jointogether.org](http://jointogether.org))
- ? Non medical use of prescription drugs among youth remains problematic.
- ? Nearly nine million teens (12-17) can get prescription drugs in a day, nearly 5 million can get prescription drugs in an hour. (CASA 2009 survey)
- ? Teens are more likely to get drunk, use marijuana and smoke cigarettes if they see their parents drunk. (CASA 2009 survey)
- ? Teen drinking behavior is strongly associated with how teens believe their fathers feel about their drinking. (CASA 2009 survey)
- ? Two thirds of high school students say that drugs are used, kept or sold at their school.
- ? 60% of parents surveyed know their child's school is not drug free, and half of those parents don't believe there is anything they can do about it. Only 25% have tried.

From jointogether.org.

**Even doctors inclined to** prescribe medical marijuana to patients have been frustrated by a lack of hard data on the drug's effects. Anecdotal evidence suggests that marijuana can help reduce pain and nausea, but there are few controlled studies to back these claims.

“Recently a research center has been established at the University of California. The Center for Medicinal Cannabis Research is a state-funded initiative to support and coordinate scientific research at universities and research centers throughout California. The goal is to assess the use of cannabis for treating specific medical conditions.”

From NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Although we do not know for certain what the benefits are of marijuana, scientists do know what the dangers are:

**The brain:** Marijuana influences pleasure, memory, thoughts, concentration, sensory and time perception and coordinated movement. Marijuana intoxication can cause distorted perceptions, impaired coordination, difficulty in thinking and problem solving and problems with learning and memory.

**Addictive potential:** Long term marijuana can lead to compulsive drug seeking— addiction. There is a tendency to use heroin or cocaine (both highly addictive) when users develop a tolerance to marijuana.

**Mental health:** A number of studies have shown an association between chronic marijuana use and increased rates of anxiety and depression. Depression is a major cause of suicide. . High doses of marijuana can produce acute psychotic reactions. Also, use of the drug may trigger the onset of or relapse of schizophrenia in vulnerable individuals. (Studies have shown a connection between the two.)

**The heart:** Marijuana increases the heart rate by 20—100%, and can last up to 3 hours. The drug can cause heart palpitations and arrhythmia, especially for older adults.

**The lungs:** Marijuana smokers can have many of the same respiratory problems as tobacco smokers— daily cough, more frequent acute chest illness and a heightened risk of lung infections. Marijuana contains more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke and because marijuana smokers usually inhale deeper and hold the smoke in their lungs longer, their lungs are exposed to the carcinogens for a longer period of time.

**The immune system:** Research indicates that marijuana decreases the function off white blood cells which fight infections. (Definitely a negative side effect for an ill individual.)

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*Components of marijuana may well provide medicinal relief to some or many of today's illnesses or diseases. But— shouldn't the determination be made by scientists and medical professionals with positive results from research and studies? Should legislators be legislating medical care and opening the door to misunderstanding and misuse of a possibly dangerous drug?*

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On Super Bowl Sunday 20 million youth under the age of 21 will be watching the football game— some with and some without parents/adults. Big alcohol companies spend millions of dollars in advertising for their products during this game. For example Anheuser-Busch spends over \$14 million a year creating the hottest beer ads to launch on Super Bowl Sunday. Over 100 million viewers will watch these commercials. The purpose, of course, to influence viewers to purchase their products. Many teens are influenced to do just that.

The Marin Institute