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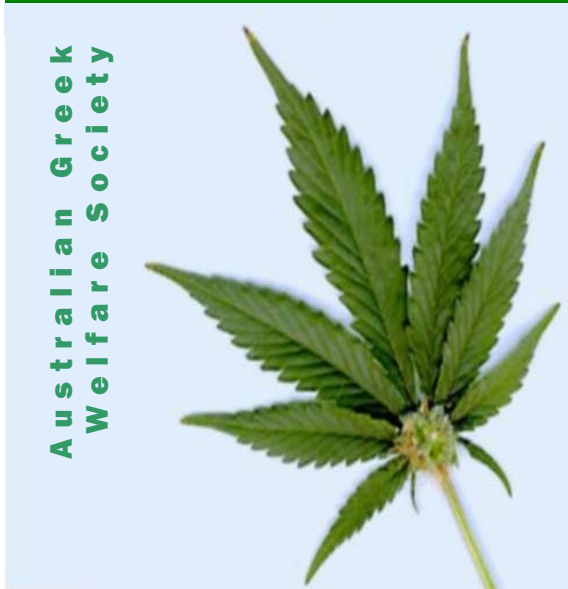
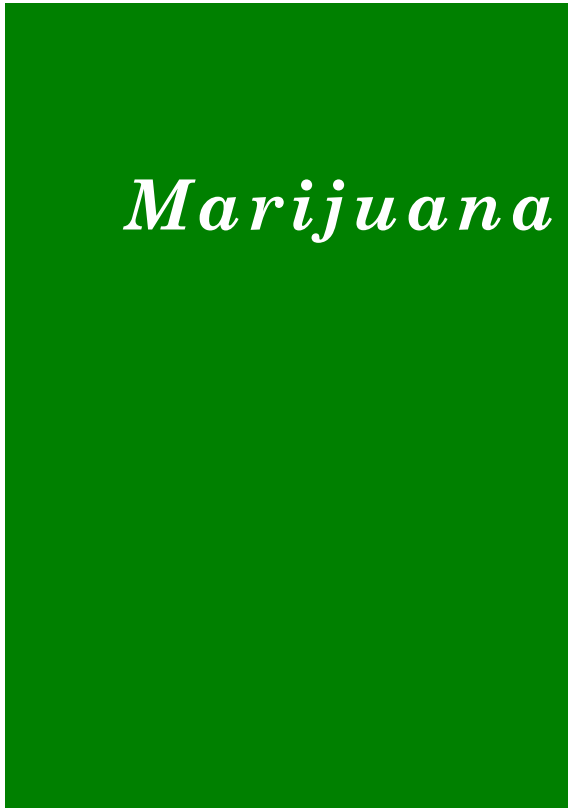
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Australian Greek Welfare Society

What is 'Marijuana'?

Marijuana is the most common and least powerful form of cannabis, a drug that is made up of dried leaves and flowers from the Cannabis Sativa plant. It can be eaten, smoked in hand rolled cigarettes or in a pipe and is the most widely used illegal drug in Australia (In 1998 39% of the Australian population reported to having used it at least once*).

The primary active chemical within marijuana is known as THC (Delta-9-Tetrahydrocannabinol). It is this active ingredient that provides the 'high' like feeling when smoked. It is absorbed into the bloodstream through the lungs (when smoked) or stomach (when eaten) and then carried to the brain.

Common effects

Marijuana slows down the central nervous system, which in turn affects the messages going to and from the brain. The THC further affects the nerve cells in the part of the brain where memories are formed, making it harder for users to recall events.

The initial feeling obtained within minutes of having taken the drug is relaxation, happiness and less inhibition. Coordination and judgement diminish, as well as the ability to think logically. After a while the effects change to include sleepiness and an increased appetite. At the same time the user's heart rate increases and their blood pressure drops.

Associated dangers

Larger quantities of this drug can lead to confusion, restlessness, anxiety, panic, detachment from reality, decreased reaction time, paranoia and hallucinations*. It should be noted that new users, or users in a non-familiar environment may suffer acute anxiety and have paranoid thoughts. In rare instances, high dosage users have had severe psychotic symptoms and required emergency medical treatment**.

Long-term users of marijuana are known to suffer from a variety of conditions including respiratory illness (marijuana smoke contains 50% to 70% more carcinogens [cancer-causing chemicals] than tobacco smoke***), less motivation or apathy (due to a lack of energy), reduced learning and concentrating abilities, as well as hormonal changes that include lower sex drives, irregular menstrual cycles and lower sperm counts.

Pregnant women who smoke marijuana are at an increased risk of giving birth to premature and low birth weight babies, which places the newborn at risk of breathing problems and infections.

Most alarmingly, regular marijuana use is linked to a condition known as 'Drug-Induced Psychosis'. This is the ability to bring on episodes of schizophrenia or manic depression in susceptible people, as well as triggering or worsening psychotic episodes in people with mental illness.

It should be noted that some marijuana users may to some degree become addicted to the drug both physically and mentally**.

Things to look out for

Marijuana users are difficult to recognize unless they are under the influence of the drug at the time of observation, in which case they may portray such visible signs such as dizziness, laughter for no apparent reason, red eyes (blood shot) or dilated (large) pupils, a lack of concentration and the inability to remember things that are taking place around them. However, these signs may also be indicative of issues other than drug use, and casual users may not show any of these symptoms.

In case of emergency

If someone is intoxicated by marijuana, sit him or her in a comfortable position and provide a glass of water with some sugar in it (or some fruit juice). Also, a cool cloth should be placed on their forehead or behind their neck. Within an hour they should be okay****, but if they are not, or they seem to be seriously ill - dial 000 and ask for ambulance assistance.

Abrupt withdrawal, as with most drugs, can produce withdrawal symptoms such as sleep disturbances, irritability, loss of appetite or weight, nervousness, and anxiety. In certain instances, people have been known to suffer from chills, increased body temperature, and tremors. Most of these symptoms last no longer than a week.

** National Institute on Drug Abuse (U.S.)

* Australian Drug Foundation

*** NIDA

**** Manly Drug Education and Counselling Centre (MDECC)