

# marijuana

■ **Overview:** Marijuana is a common name for the drug contained in the leaves and flowering tops of the hemp plant, known scientifically as *cannabis sativa*. The plant has been cultivated for both its fiber content and its medicinal and psycho-



active effects for at least 4,000 years, but has generated heated controversy and emotional debate in this country since use was outlawed in 1937. Slang names include *pot*, *reefer*, *chronic*, *grass*, and *weed*.

■ **Actions/Effects:** The main psychoactive drug in marijuana is *delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol*, or THC. It activates receptors in the brain called *anandamides*, which trigger the drug's effects. Subjective effects include mild sensory distortions, feelings of euphoria, and increased appetite. Objective effects include reddening of the eyes and increased heart rate.

■ **Risks/Side Effects:** The most common adverse reactions linked to marijuana are psychological and include feelings of unease, anxiety, or restlessness, which usually pass without outside intervention. Other potential risks include smoking-related respiratory damage, temporary impairment of short-term memory, and psychological dependence.



■ **Medical Uses:** Marijuana's medical status remains controversial—despite approval by 16 states to authorize its medical use. Although marijuana has no federally-sanctioned medical uses, it's been used through the ages to treat a variety of ills. Currently (and unofficially), it's used by sufferers of glaucoma to reduce pressure inside the eye, by cancer patients to reduce the vomiting caused by chemotherapy, and by people with AIDS to combat the appetite loss and “wasting syndrome” associated with that disease.



■ **Duration:** 3-4 hours, although subtle effects may linger for several more hours.

■ **Trends:** Marijuana use appears to be declining gradually, according to recent national surveys. The number of high-school seniors reporting any lifetime use dropped over the past decade, falling from 48.8 percent in 2000 to 43.8 percent in 2010. Use during the previous year showed a similar, but smaller, decline, dropping from 36.5 in 2000 to 34.8 percent in 2010.

■ **Demographics:** Although marijuana use extends across all demographic categories, it continues to be most prevalent among younger age groups. More than 106 million Americans have tried pot, with some two million trying it for the first time last year. An estimated 16.7 million Americans smoke it on a regular basis.



This is one in a series of fact sheets on drugs and health published by Do It Now Foundation. Please call for a complete list of titles—or visit our web site at [www.doitnow.org](http://www.doitnow.org).



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