Violence and Suicide

A Swedish study found more suicides among pot users than those who used alcohol, heroin or amphetamine and the manner of death was more violent. No other group jumped from high buildings. Young male cannabis users are nearly 4 times more likely to be violent than non-users, the risk for alcohol users is around 3. Parents and siblings may be injured and homicides are not uncommon.

Other Effects on the body

Cannabis smoke deposits three to four times as much tar in the lungs and airways as tobacco smoke. Cases of lung cancer, bronchitis and emphysema have been reported.

THC interferes with the DNA of new cells made in an adult body – white blood cells, sperm and foetal cells. It hastens programmed cell death (apoptosis). Fewer white blood cells are produced, many are abnormal and can't fight off infections. Sperm production is decreased. Infertility and even impotence have been reported. Babies born to cannabis using mothers are smaller, hyperactive and have behaviour and learning problems. They are also likely to have withdrawal symptoms and to use cannabis themselves at adolescence. There have been reports of miscarriages and ectopic pregnancies.

Blood pressure and heart rates rise to the levels of real stress. Heart attacks have been reported. Two teenagers had strokes and died after bingeing on cannabis, another was left paralysed.

Gateway

There is increasing evidence for the 'Gateway' theory – that cannabis use can lead to the use of other drugs.

Medical cannabis

Smoking cannabis for medication is like eating mouldy bread to get your penicillin, or chewing willow bark for aspirin. Medicines by law must be pure single substances so their actions are predictable and controllable. Synthetic THC (Nabilone, UK and Marinol, USA) have been available for many years to combat the nausea of chemotherapy and to stimulate appetite but have many side-effects. Some Health Authorities have questioned the efficacy of Sativex (THC + CBD). The 'scam' was started in 1979 by a pot-using American lawyer who said, 'We will use the medical marijuana argument as a red herring to give pot a good name'.

Brain Scans

In the last few years, scans have found brain damage in cannabis users. The volume of gray matter (cell bodies) has been reduced in areas responsible for learning, emotions and motivation.

Details of all these effects can be seen in 'How it works in the brain' and references in 'complete document' in 'Downloads' on our website www.cannabisskunksense.co.uk.

cannabis

get the facts

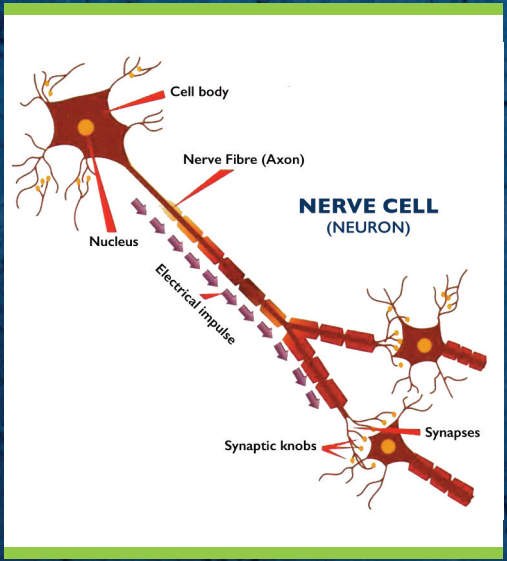
What is cannabis, the effects on the body and brain, the effects on children and younger people and

what you should know

CANNABIS SKUNK SENSE

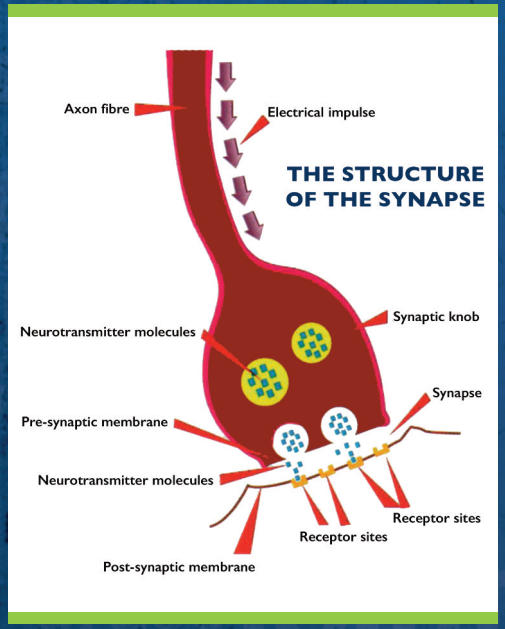
cannabis

How it works in the brain



Cannabis (also known as skunk, marijuana, pot, grass, weed, joints, spliff, hashish, blow) is a hallucinogen, a depressant and our commonest illegal drug. THC (psychotic tetrahydrocannabinol) gives the 'high'.

100 billion nerve cells (neurons) may have up to 10,000 connections to other neurons in the vast brain network. Messages pass along the nerve fibres as electrical impulses, then cross the gap between the neurons (the synapse) in the form of chemicals "neurotransmitters" the brain's natural drugs. Each neurotransmitter molecule has a particular shape to fit into its receptor site on the next neuron as a key fits into a lock.



Mind-altering drugs like cannabis or more specifically THC, mimic the shape of these neurotransmitters so the brain is "fooled". THC mimics anandamide and also interferes with the transmission of other neurotransmitters because it dissolves in the fatty cell membranes and persists. Fifty per cent of the THC is still there after a week and ten per cent a month later. Traces are still detectable in hair and urine for weeks after that.

10% of those who try cannabis will become addicted

Strength

Old-fashioned herbal cannabis had a THC content of 1%-2%. Hash (resin) has consistently averaged 4%-6% THC and 3.5% CBD (anti-psychotic cannabidiol). CBD in hash helped to counteract the psychotic effects of THC. Skunk, average 16.2% THC and virtually no CBD occupies at least 80% of the market.

The immediate effects

Taken for euphoria (a 'high'), usually smoked or eaten in "hash" cakes. Some people get hungry – 'the munchies'. Panic attacks and paranoia can occur immediately after a joint. It is an intoxicant, like alcohol, so people should not drive for at least 24 hours after a joint. An average joint has the same effect as being just over the legal alcohol-driving limit. The combination of cannabis and alcohol is 16 times more dangerous.

The long-term effects

Just one joint a week or even once a month will ensure a permanent presence of THC in the brain. Other neurotransmitters are affected, so new nerve connections can't be made properly for learning and memory etc. Few children, using cannabis even occasionally, will achieve their full potential. The IQ of teens who get hooked and continue to use falls by average 8 points – permanently.

Dependence

Psychological addiction: Cannabis, like alcohol, heroin, cocaine etc, increases the amount of dopamine, the 'pleasure' neurotransmitter in the reward centre of the brain. Strong cravings can last for years and be triggered by the sight of drug paraphernalia.

Physical addiction: As more and more THC is consumed, production of anandamide stops – it's not needed. If THC is stopped the receptor sites are left empty. This results in withdrawal symptoms, irritability, anxiety, depression, lack of sleep etc. 10% of those who TRY cannabis will become addicted, in teenage users this rises to 1 in 6. There is no foolproof cure for any type of addiction.

Mental Health

THC reduces serotonin ('happiness' neurotransmitter) so users may suffer from depression. Cannabis psychosis has been reported since 1845. Anyone can become psychotic, it's simply a matter of how much they take. Skunk users are 7 times more likely to suffer psychosis than those who use hash. Cannabis (THC) increases the amount of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the brain. The brains of psychotics and schizophrenics have excess dopamine. Cannabis users double the chances of developing schizophrenia – a chronic, often lifetime condition.

Cannabis is a hallucinogen, a depressant and our commonest illegal drug