



What is marijuana?

Photo by NIDA

Also known as: Boom, Bud, Chronic, Gangster, Ganja, Grass, Herb, Kif, Mary Jane, MJ, Pot, Reefer, Skunk, and Weed

Marijuana is the dried leaves and flowers of the *Cannabis sativa* or *Cannabis indica* plant. Stronger forms of the drug include high potency strains - known as sinsemilla (sin-seh-me-yah), hashish (hash for short), and extracts including hash oil, shatter, wax, and budder.

Of the more than 500 chemicals in marijuana, *delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol*, known as THC, is responsible for many of the drug's psychotropic (mind-altering) effects. It's this chemical that distorts how the mind perceives the world.

The amount of THC in marijuana has increased over the past few decades. In the early 1990s, the average THC content in marijuana was about 3.74 percent. In 2013, it was almost 10 percent, and much higher in some products such as oils and other extracts.¹ Scientists do not yet know what this increase in potency means for a person's health. It may cause users to take in higher amounts of THC – which could lead to greater health risks including increased risk of addiction, or they may adjust how they consume marijuana (by smoking or eating less) to compensate for the greater potency. There have been reports of people seeking help in emergency rooms with symptoms, including psychosis (having false thoughts or seeing or hearing things that aren't there), after consuming high concentrations of THC.

The marijuana plant itself has not been approved as a medicine by the federal government. However, the plant contains chemicals—called cannabinoids—that may be useful for treating a range of illnesses or symptoms.

It is important to note that a growing number of states have legalized the marijuana plant's use for certain medical conditions, and a smaller number have voted to legalize it for recreational use. So, in some cases, federal and state marijuana laws conflict. It is illegal to grow, buy, sell, or carry marijuana under federal law. The federal government considers marijuana a Schedule I substance—having no medicinal uses and high risk for misuse.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse Blog Team. "Marijuana." *Drugs & Health Blog*, National Institute on Drug Abuse, <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/marijuana>. Accessed 26 Jan. 2018.



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