

MYTH 3

Marijuana is not as harmful to your health as tobacco.

Although some people think of marijuana as a benign natural herb, the drug actually contains many of the same cancer-causing chemicals found in tobacco. Puff for puff, the amount of tar inhaled and the level of carbon monoxide absorbed by those who smoke marijuana, regardless of THC content, are three to five times greater than among tobacco smokers.³⁷

Regular use of marijuana appears to be at least as damaging as regular use of tobacco.⁸⁰

Consequently, people who use marijuana on a regular basis often have the same breathing problems as tobacco users, such as chronic coughing and wheezing, more frequent acute chest illnesses, and a tendency toward obstructed airways. And because respiratory problems can affect athletic performance, smoking marijuana may be particularly harmful to kids involved in sports.

Researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, have determined that marijuana smoking can cause potentially serious damage to the respiratory system at a relatively early age. Moreover, in a review of research on the health effects of marijuana use, the researchers cited findings that show “the daily smoking of relatively small amounts of marijuana (3 to 4 joints) has at least a comparable, if not greater effect” on the respiratory system than the smoking of more than 20 tobacco cigarettes.³⁸

Recently, scientists in England produced further evidence linking marijuana use to respiratory problems in young people. A research team at the University of Birmingham found that regular use of marijuana, even for less than six years, causes a marked deterioration in lung function. These findings, the study concludes, “may have serious long-term implications for what is currently regarded as a relatively ‘harmless’ recreational habit.”³⁹