



# LEAVE THE PACK BEHIND

Campus-Based Brief Tobacco Intervention Bulletin

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### Special Interest:

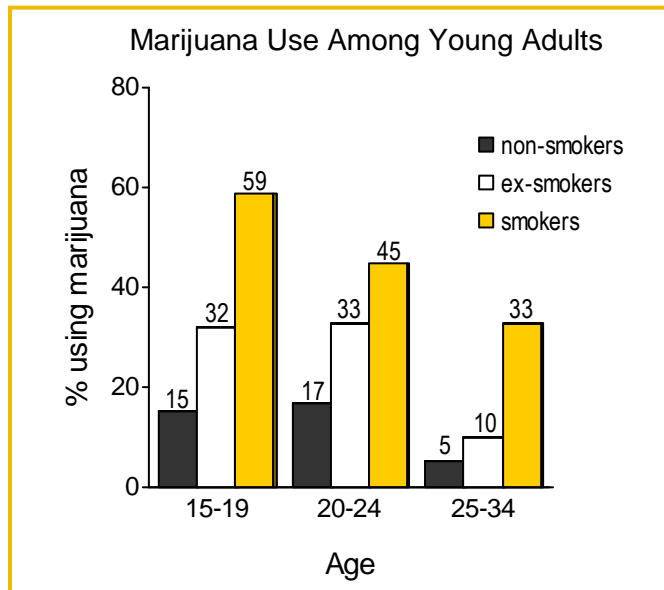
- Treating marijuana dependence may be more effective if concurrent tobacco use is addressed.<sup>11</sup>
- Marijuana use and mental health: what are the risks?
- Tobacco and marijuana use are comorbid behaviors

## Tobacco and Marijuana Use

### What are Students Smoking?

There is evidence that tobacco and marijuana use are co-morbid behaviors.<sup>14</sup> Using a national sample, Leatherdale et al. (2007)<sup>2</sup> found that young adults who currently smoke cigarettes were more likely to use marijuana than were ex-smokers or never-smokers.

**Among Canadian post-secondary students:**  
 51% have tried marijuana  
 32% have used marijuana in the past year  
 17% have used marijuana in the past month<sup>5</sup>



## Marijuana & Tobacco: The Chicken or the Egg?

Swift and colleagues<sup>6</sup> examined the association between tobacco and marijuana use by age 18 and problematic marijuana use at 24 years. Using 10-year longitudinal data collected from nearly 2,000 young Australians, they examined early-onset (before age 16), persistent (multi-year), and heavy (weekly+) use of tobacco and marijuana. Taking into account confounding factors, they showed that problematic marijuana use at age 24 was:

- strongly related to heavy, persistent, early-onset marijuana use

- *independently* related to persistent cigarette smoking in the teens

The researchers conclude early, persistent tobacco use among marijuana users may be an important marker of later problematic marijuana use.

Using the same dataset, Patton and colleagues<sup>3</sup> determined that:

- even a *transient* phase of weekly marijuana use during the teens was associated with a large (i.e., eightfold) increase in the odds of later initiation of tobacco use
- daily marijuana use

among non-nicotine-dependent 21-year-old smokers tripled their odds of being nicotine dependent at age 24

Here, the researchers conclude that weekly use of marijuana during teens and young adulthood may increase the risk of late initiation of tobacco use and progression to nicotine dependence.

While it's unclear "which came first," it is obvious that the comorbidity of tobacco and marijuana use must be considered when intervening with either substance.

### Contributors

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## Marijuana Intervention

Because marijuana users can become addicted, they can have withdrawal symptoms when trying to quit: anxiety, irritability, misery, muscle pain, chills, sleep disturbances and decreased appetite.<sup>7</sup> In fact, research shows the time course and magnitude of marijuana withdrawal symptoms are similar to those associated with nicotine withdrawal.<sup>7</sup>

It may be that young adult students who use marijuana will respond favourably to behavioural interventions typically aimed at tobacco smokers. Consider applying the Ask – Advise – Assist – Arrange protocol to marijuana. And don't forget to address tobacco use when helping marijuana users manage their drug use.

## Marijuana Facts You can Use



**1** A joint has **3x** more tar and **5x** more carbon monoxide than a cigarette.<sup>8</sup>

**2** Marijuana is stronger and more harmful than it was in the '60s and '70s; THC levels are often 10 times higher.<sup>9</sup>

**3** For cigarette smokers trying to quit, using marijuana as a substitute for tobacco may make it harder to quit smoking.<sup>1</sup>

**4** Marijuana users usually smoke less often than daily cigarette smokers, but because of the way marijuana is smoked (no filter<sup>10</sup> and deeper, longer inhalations<sup>8</sup>) marijuana use causes respiratory and cardiopulmonary damage similar to tobacco use.

**5** Treatment for dependence of marijuana may be more effective if it addresses the issue of concurrent tobacco use.<sup>11</sup>

**6** Pharmacological effects of concurrent marijuana and tobacco use on the developing adolescent brain may establish brain pathways that mutually reinforce continued use and dependence on both of these drugs.<sup>3</sup>

## Is Marijuana Use Correlated with Psychosis?

Moore and colleagues<sup>12</sup> meta-analyzed 35 recent studies examining marijuana use and mental health disorders. The researchers found marijuana users to be 41% more likely than never-users to develop a psychotic illness, and noted a positive dose-response relationship between marijuana use and risk of illness.

While their meta-analysis suggests that even occasional use of marijuana may be associated with higher risk of mental health disorders such as depression and schizophrenia, the researchers note that overall risk remains very low. Furthermore, because the data are correlational, it is unknown whether marijuana use increases the risk of psychosis, or whether individuals who choose to use marijuana are already pre-disposed to developing psychosis.

Nevertheless, the results underline the need to remind marijuana users of long-term risks of use, and dispel myths that marijuana is a benign drug.



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