



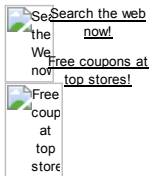
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Marijuana vs. Alcohol

Introduction

Safer for the Consumer

Safer for the Community

Introduction

To say that marijuana has been given a bad rap over the past few decades is an understatement. If you're like most Americans, you have been led to believe that marijuana is a dangerous and addictive drug that has destroyed the lives of millions of teens and adults. You have been encouraged to believe that marijuana causes lung cancer and is a "gateway" to harder drugs. The government has even tried to convince you that most people who use marijuana are losers who sit around on couches all day doing nothing.

What we would like to do is wipe the slate clean and start over. Forget everything you have heard in the past and be open-minded to the truth about marijuana. We are not here to tell you that it is without harms or is some kind of miracle drug. We simply hope you will come to understand that it is far, far less harmful than what your government has told you.

Part of the problem is that many people are simply unfamiliar with marijuana. They have never tried it (or perhaps only tried it a time or two decades ago) and assume the worst. They have been conditioned to think that marijuana use is bad and that people who use it are dangerous or strange or maybe even dirty. They have visions of people using marijuana and being totally zonked out, unable to maintain a regular conversation.

The truth is that marijuana is widely used in a manner quite similar to alcohol. Adults might consume it before enjoying a dinner party with friends. Friends might have a little before engaging in a spirited game of ultimate Frisbee. And spouses – yes, even some couples you know – might imbibe a bit while enjoying a romantic evening together. Concert-goers have even been known to have a puff or two before or during a show – which more likely than not results in them dancing or otherwise enjoying the music, not lying on the ground like lumps.

None of this is "bad" or "wrong" or "immoral." It is simply something that these responsible adults choose to do. And frequently it is something they choose to do specifically instead of alcohol. And for good reason! Alcohol is more toxic, more addictive, more harmful to the body, more likely to result in injuries, and more likely to lead to interpersonal violence than marijuana.

Below are just a few facts that highlight the very different impacts of these two popular substances on those who consume them and on the broader community. A vast amount of additional information can be found in the book, *Marijuana is Safer: So why are we driving people to drink?* (Chelsea Green, 2009), which can be purchased on Amazon.com or accessed for free online at Scribd.com.

Safer for the Consumer

- **Many people die from alcohol use. Nobody dies from marijuana use.** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [reports](#) that more than 37,000 annual U.S. deaths, including more than 1,400 in Colorado, are attributed to alcohol use alone (i.e. this figure does not include accidental deaths). On the other hand, the CDC does not even have a category for deaths caused by the use of marijuana.
- **People die from alcohol overdoses. There has never been a fatal marijuana overdose.** The official publication of the Scientific Research Society, *American Scientist*, [reported](#) that alcohol is one of the most toxic drugs and using just 10 times what one would use to get the desired effect could lead to death. Marijuana is one of – if not *the* – least toxic drugs, requiring thousands of times the dose one would use to get

the desired effect to lead to death. This “thousands of times” is actually theoretical, since there has never been a case of an individual dying from a marijuana overdose. Meanwhile, [according to the CDC](#), hundreds of alcohol overdose deaths occur the United States each year.

- **The health-related costs associated with alcohol use far exceed those for marijuana use.** Health-related costs for alcohol consumers are eight times greater than those for marijuana consumers, according to [an assessment recently published](#) in the *British Columbia Mental Health and Addictions Journal*. More specifically, the annual cost of alcohol consumption is \$165 per user, compared to just \$20 per user for marijuana. This should not come as a surprise given the vast amount of research that shows alcohol poses far more – and more significant – health problems than marijuana.
- **Alcohol use damages the brain. Marijuana use does not.** Despite the myths we've heard throughout our lives about marijuana killing brain cells, it turns out that a growing number of studies seem to indicate that marijuana actually has neuroprotective properties. This means that it works to *protect* brain cells from harm. For example, [one recent study](#) found that teens who used marijuana as well as alcohol suffered significantly less damage to the white matter in their brains. Of course, what is beyond question is that alcohol damages brain cells.
- **Alcohol use is linked to cancer. Marijuana use is not.** Alcohol use is associated with [a wide variety of cancers](#), including cancers of the esophagus, stomach, colon, lungs, pancreas, liver and prostate. Marijuana use has not been conclusively associated with any form of cancer. In fact, [one study](#) recently contradicted the long-time government claim that marijuana use is associated with head and neck cancers. It found that marijuana use actually *reduced* the likelihood of head and neck cancers. If you are concerned about marijuana being associated with lung cancer, you may be interested in the results of [the largest case-controlled study ever](#) conducted to investigate the respiratory effects of marijuana smoking and cigarette smoking. Released in 2006, the study, conducted by Dr. Donald Tashkin at the University of California at Los Angeles, found that marijuana smoking was *not* associated with an increased risk of developing lung cancer. Surprisingly, the researchers found that people who smoked marijuana actually had *lower* incidences of cancer compared to non-users of the drug.
- **Alcohol is more addictive than marijuana.** Addiction researchers have consistently [reported](#) that marijuana is far less addictive than alcohol based on a number of factors. In particular, alcohol use can result in significant and potentially fatal physical withdrawal, whereas marijuana has not been found to produce any symptoms of physical withdrawal. Those who use alcohol are also much more likely to develop dependence and build tolerance.
- **Alcohol use increases the risk of injury to the consumer. Marijuana use does not.** Many people who have consumed alcohol or know others who have consumed alcohol would not be surprised to hear that it greatly increases the risk of serious injury. Research [published this year](#) in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, found that 36 percent of hospitalized assaults and 21 percent of all injuries are attributable to alcohol use by the injured person. Meanwhile, the *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* reported that lifetime use of marijuana is rarely associated with emergency room visits. According to the British Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, this is because: "Cannabis differs from alcohol ... in one major respect. It does not seem to increase risk-taking behavior. This means that cannabis rarely contributes to violence either to others or to oneself, whereas alcohol use is a major factor in deliberate self-harm, domestic accidents and violence." Interestingly enough, [some research](#) has even shown that marijuana use has been associated with a *decreased* risk of injury.

Safer for the Community

- **Alcohol use contributes to aggressive and violent behavior. Marijuana use does not.** Studies have repeatedly shown that alcohol, unlike marijuana, contributes to the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior. [An article](#) published in the *Journal of Addictive Behaviors* reported that "alcohol is clearly the drug with the most evidence to support a direct intoxication-violence relationship," whereas "cannabis reduces the likelihood of violence during intoxication."
- **Alcohol use is a major factor in violent crimes. Marijuana use is not.** The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [estimates](#) that 25-30% of violent crimes in the United States are linked to the use of alcohol. According to [a report](#) from the U.S. Dept. of Justice, that translates to about 5,000,000 alcohol-related violent crimes per year. By contrast, the government does not even track violent acts specifically related to marijuana use, as the use of marijuana has not been associated with violence. (Of course, we should note that marijuana *prohibition*, by creating a widespread criminal market, *is* associated with acts of violence.)
- **Alcohol use contributes to the likelihood of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Marijuana use does not.** Alcohol is a major contributing factor in the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault. This is not to say that alcohol *causes* these problems; rather, its use makes it more likely that an individual prone to such behavior will act on it. For example, [a study](#) conducted by the Research Institute on

Addictions found that among individuals who were chronic partner abusers, the use of alcohol was associated with significant increases in the daily likelihood of male-to-female physical aggression, but the use of marijuana was not. Specifically, the odds of abuse were eight times higher on days when men were drinking; the odds of severe abuse were 11 times higher. According to the [Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#) website highlights alcohol as the "most commonly used chemical in crimes of sexual assault" and provides information on an array of other drugs that have been linked to sexual violence. Given the fact that marijuana is so accessible and widely used, it is quite telling that the word "marijuana" does not appear anywhere on the page.

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