

# Is marijuana smoke a cancer risk?

Marijuana smoke can harm lung health, and some studies show that it could be linked to lung cancer.

The drug, which has been legalized for recreational use in eight states, could increase a person's cancer risk, although it is difficult to prove this beyond the shadow of a doubt. A 2008 study published in the *European Respiratory Journal* did find that long-term use of cannabis increases the risk of lung cancer in young adults.

There are a few reasons marijuana smoke can be especially harmful:

- Those who smoke cannabis inhale more deeply and hold their breath for longer.
- Marijuana cigarettes are typically smoked without filters, have a smaller butt size, and are less densely packed than a tobacco cigarette. This leads to a higher concentration of smoke being inhaled.

The American Cancer Society notes that is difficult to definitively link marijuana use to lung cancer. Participants in studies relating to marijuana smoking may also smoke tobacco cigarettes, and it is tough to determine how much of the increase in cancer risk comes from marijuana and how much comes from tobacco.

In addition, marijuana remains an illegal drug under federal law, making it is difficult to gather information about its link to cancer.

However, there is no doubt that marijuana smoke can bring negative health effects. Marijuana smoke can contain many of the same carcinogens as tobacco smoke, the American Lung Association states, and it clearly damages the lungs.

Chronic bronchitis, a chronic cough, and other respiratory problems may all be associated with marijuana smoke. In addition, smoking marijuana can suppress a person's immune system.

There are other health concerns with marijuana as well, including its impact on memory, thinking, and problem-solving.

When it comes to associating marijuana smoke with an increased risk for cancer, however, more studies need to be done before a definitive link can be made.



## Additional Resources



U.S. National Library of Medicine, “Marijuana,” <https://medlineplus.gov/marijuana.html>

This website provides fact sheets about marijuana, as well as information about research and studies.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “**Cancer and tobacco use,**” CDC Vital Signs

This fact sheet provides information about tobacco use and its link to cancer.