Some people say it is **DANGEROUS**.

Others say it is **HARMLESS**.

Some even want to turn it into a **MEDICINE**.

Here's what you should know about the most widely used illicit drug in America. -
From: NCADD brochure, Just The Facts: Marijuana.

Derived from the hemp plant, *cannabis sativa,* marijuana, is a dry, shredded green and brown mix of flowers, stems, seeds, and leaves. Marijuana is the most commonly used and abused illicit drug in the U.S.. While marijuana contains more than 400 different chemicals, the main mind-altering chemical in marijuana is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC. The level of THC content in marijuana after cultivation can range from less than 1% to more than 30% and has been increasing dramatically, making marijuana **increasingly potent and more addictive**.

MYTH: Marijuana is harmless.

FACT: According to the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), in 2010 there were over 572,000 marijuana-involve d admissions to hospital emergency rooms. The same report inddicated that during the same timeframe, an estimated 11,406 emergency department visits involved a

synthetic cannabinoid product, sometimes referred to as "synthetic marijuana" and commonly known by street names such as "Spice" or "K2". (Source: http://www.samhsa.gov/data/2k12/DAWN105/SR105-synthetic-marijuana.pdf)

How is Marijuana Used? Commonly known as pot, weed, herb, dope, reefer, grass etc., marijuana is usually smoked as a cigarette (joint) or in a pipe, waterpipe, bong or in a blunt (a cigar emptied of tobacco and refilled with a mixture of marijuana and tobacco). Marijuana is also mixed in baked goods (*e.g.*, cookies or brownies) and brewed as a tea. A more concentrated, higher THC content, resinous form of marijuana, is called hashish and, as a sticky black liquid, hash oil. Marijuana smoke has a pungent and distinctive, usually sweet-and-sour odor. Marijuana is sometimes laced with crack cocaine and/or hallucinogen phencyclidine (PCP), making marijuana more dangerous.

Marijuana- Short-Term Effects: The effects of a “joint” are generally felt within a few minutes and reach a peak between 10 and 30 minutes. Overall, most of marijuana’s short-term effects wear off within 2 or 3 hours.

How Does Marijuana Affect the Brain? When someone smokes marijuana, THC is absorbed by the lungs and into the bloodstream, which carries the THC to the brain and all other organs throughout the body, producing the "high" that users experience. The parts of the brain most affected include those that influence pleasure, memory, thinking, concentrating, sensory and time perception and coordinated movement.

Marijuana- Long-Term Effects: According to NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse), research has shown that, in chronic users, marijuana's adverse impact on learning and memory can last for days or weeks after the acute effects of the drug wear off. As a result, a daily marijuana smoker may be functioning at a suboptimal intellectual level all of the time. Research has also shown poorer cognitive abilities than non-users, including memory capability, math and verbal skills. And, as discussed earlier, marijuana can be addictive.

MYTH: Marijuana is not addictive.

FACT: Each year more teens enter treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than all other illicit drugs combined.

According to NIDA, long-term marijuana use can lead to addiction for about 9% of users and increases among those who start young (to about 17%) and daily users (25-50%).

Long-term marijuana abusers trying to quit report withdrawal symptoms including irritability, sleeplessness, decreased appetite, anxiety, and drug craving. The symptoms begin within

about 1 day after last use, peak at 2-3 days, and subside within 1 or 2 weeks.

If you are concerned about your use of marijuana or that of a friend, here are 12 Questions used by Marijuana Anonymous and visit Get Help.

Marijuana and Mental Health: A number of studies have shown an association between chronic marijuana use and increased rates of anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia with age at first use to be an important risk factor. High doses of marijuana can produce an acute psychotic reaction.

How Does Marijuana Affect the Lungs? Numerous studies have shown marijuana smoke to contain 50-70% more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke. Marijuana has a higher burn temperature, is inhaled more deeply and held in the lungs longer than tobacco smoke. As a result, marijuana smokers can have many of the same problems as tobacco smokers like daily cough, more frequent acute chest illness, and a heightened risk of lung infections.

What About "Medical" Marijuana? The potential medicinal properties of marijuana have been the subject of substantive research and heated debate. There are two FDA approved cannabinoid-based medications that include synthetic compounds; dronabinol (Marinol®) and nabilone (Cesamet®). Both of these medicines can be prescribed by physicians.

After careful consideration and review, the NCADD Medical-Scientific Committee, Delegate Assembly and Board of Directors adopted an NCADD Position Statement: Opposition to Medical Marijuana.