
Understanding Synthetic Marijuana

Synthetic marijuana is the name given to manmade chemicals that act like those found in marijuana. Marijuana comes from the hemp plant. The chemicals in marijuana are found in the leaves and flowering shoots. The most well-known of these chemicals is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol). Using THC causes changes in your mood, behavior, and thinking.

Why synthetic marijuana is a problem

Synthetic marijuana may cause effects similar to natural marijuana. But the chemicals in synthetic marijuana are more potent. They can make the feeling of pleasure more intense. But they can also make the undesirable and dangerous effects of traditional marijuana more intense. Synthetic marijuana is often sold as an herbal or a natural substance that says it's a harmless and legal version of marijuana. People then think that the product is safe to use. But this is not true. Synthetic marijuana does not have THC in it. But the chemicals it does have act at the same sites in the brain as THC. So you get similar changes in mood and behavior. Studies show that the chemicals used in synthetic marijuana affect the brain much more than similar amounts of marijuana. Scientists also believe that the chemicals act on other areas in the brain that marijuana does not. As a result, unexpected and dangerous effects can often occur.

Because making synthetic marijuana is not controlled, there is no way to know what other things have been added that might cause more effects. Studies also show that the chemicals used in making synthetic marijuana products can differ greatly from one product to another. Another big problem with synthetic marijuana is that the chemicals being used are always changing. The chemicals are often mixed with other substances that can be very harmful. These include rat poison or acetone. The makers are also adding other drugs, such as ecstasy, fentanyl, methamphetamine, or bath salts, to the products. This makes them even more risky and dangerous. So, it's hard to tell what effects someone might have.

How synthetic marijuana is used

In most cases, the chemicals are sprayed on dried plant material and smoked. Synthetic marijuana can also be burned, like incense. Or it can be mixed and brewed as a tea or herbal drink. Synthetic marijuana can also be sold as a liquid to be inhaled, such as with e-cigarettes or through vaping.

Spotting synthetic marijuana

There are many different street names for synthetic marijuana. Makers of the product often choose names that are attractive and tempting to lure the users. The most common names include Spice, Spike, K2, Fake Weed, Joker, RedXDawn, and Black Mamba. Other common street names may include:

- Blaze
- Paradise
- Kronik
- Mr. Nice Guy
- Zohai

- Dream
- Genie
- Skunk
- Scooby Snax
- Gangsta
- Dr. Feel Good
- Moon Rocks
- Yucatan
- Fire
- Crazy Clown
- Serenity

This is not a complete list. Just like the products, the names are always changing. The same name may be used for products that have different chemicals. New names may be added as the chemicals in the product change. Or a maker may use the same name for a new product even though the new product has different chemicals in it than the old one.

How synthetic marijuana affects the body

Synthetic marijuana can lead to effects that are like those of marijuana. But the effects can be much stronger and dangerous. These may include:

- Feeling of joy, relaxation
- Increased sense of sight, hearing, and taste
- Increased appetite
- Loss of coordination
- False sense of time
- Trouble thinking or problem-solving that can also affect driving

Dangerous effects include:

- Severe nervousness and worry (agitation)
- Feeling that you can't breathe and are going to die
- Confusion
- Vomiting (often uncontrollable). This is called cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome (CHS).
- Being overly suspicious or distrustful of others (paranoia)
- Suicidal thoughts

- Heavy sweating
- Trouble sleeping
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucination)
- Believing that something is there that isn't (delusion)
- Violent behavior
- Fast or uneven heart rate
- Fast breathing
- Higher blood pressure
- Less blood flow to the heart, possibly causing a heart attack
- Kidney injury
- Seizures
- Death

Long-term effects of synthetic marijuana

Scientists think that synthetic marijuana can be addicting. Studies show that people who use it over a long time and then stop using it have withdrawal symptoms. These may include severe headache, irritability, mood swings, anxiety, chest pain, problems breathing, and seizures. These symptoms are very similar to the most common side effects of traditional marijuana. Less is known about the long-term effects of synthetic marijuana because of the many different chemicals used in making them. More studies are needed in this area.

Call 911

Call 911 right away if the person has any of the following:

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain or a very rapid heart rate
- Loss of consciousness
- Violent behavior
- Seizures

Call or text 988 if the person is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others. You will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. An online chat option is also available at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org. You can also call Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255). Lifeline is free and available 24/7.

To learn more

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- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Helpline at 800-662-HELP (800-662-4357)
 - [National Institute on Drug Abuse at www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse](http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse)
 - [Marijuana Anonymous World Services at www.marijuana-anonymous.org](http://www.marijuana-anonymous.org)
 - [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) or 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255). Online chat option is available.