



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

Pot used to be pretty harmless, but it's plenty dangerous today

It's up to 10 times stronger than in the '60s and '70s and powerfully addictive

DR. GRACE M. MCGORRIAN | MAY 24, 2015

"I treat addicts. Trust me, this drug can be dangerous."

I am a physician who grew up in the 1960s and '70s when marijuana was the go-to drug for relaxing with friends or listening to music. Even those who didn't smoke pot knew plenty of people who did and didn't see much harm in it. We rightfully mocked vilifications of marijuana in propaganda films such as "Reefer Madness."

I don't particularly like pot, but I always thought simple possession should be decriminalized and legitimate medical uses permitted. But, as a psychiatrist with special interest in addictions and forensics, I worry as our country plunges forward with ever-expanding marijuana legalization.

Why? Because the marijuana being sold today is nothing like the roadside weed of decades past.

THC is the primary psychoactive chemical in pot. A little bit can be relaxing, ease some pains and stimulate appetite.

Old-fashioned natural marijuana had low or moderate amounts of THC, along with cannabidiol, a chemical that shields the brain against THC's effects. **Modern marijuana has been genetically modified to be more potent — six to 10 times higher in THC. And it has very little cannabidiol, which means there is little protection against intense psychoactivity, including psychotic experiences.**

The unfertilized flowers of the marijuana plant — sold as *sinsemilla* (without seeds) — are even higher in THC. And if a user extracts THC to make hash oil, or "dabs," multiply three times again.

What are dabs? That's when butane is poured on buds or stems to make BHO (butane hash oil), which has extremely high concentrations of THC. The extract is then dropped on tiny wax squares and smoked in a high-heat bong that resembles nothing so much as fancy crack smoking.

This is not your grandfather's marijuana.

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Finally, **regular use of today's high-potency weed for any period of time under age 18, but particularly under age 15, is associated with a three- to five-times increase in the odds of developing schizophrenia.**

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Is poor driving due to booze or meds or weed? Only expensive testing can differentiate between a non-intoxicated casual user who smoked three weeks back and the regular user who is high while driving — both have the same positive result with a basic urine screen.

As a doctor and a personal friend of some heavy smokers trying to live a sober life, I am saddened by the multitude of uninformed comments suggesting that marijuana is utterly benign — including those from prominent M.D.s in our community.

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Full article here: <http://goo.gl/JjUZEM>

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Chicago Can't Afford to Legalize Marijuana



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