

Think Your Teen's Pot Smoking Is No Biggie? Studies Show It Can Trigger Psychosis

With the expanding legalization of cannabis in the U.S., you may think it isn't such a big deal if your tween or teen is smoking pot. Think again! A wealth of research shows that [cannabis harms the teenage brain](#), but one of the more surprising—and alarming—findings is that regular use of marijuana is associated with a higher risk of psychosis. And the risk is even greater in people who start smoking at a young age.

Parents need to pay close attention considering that cannabis use is widespread among adolescents and teens.

Approximately [1.8 million adolescents](#) between the ages of 12 and 17 were cannabis users in 2015. And an estimated 23% of 12th graders, 14% of 10th graders, and 5% of 8th graders use the drug at least once a month, according to the latest [statistics](#).



The Marijuana-Psychosis Connection

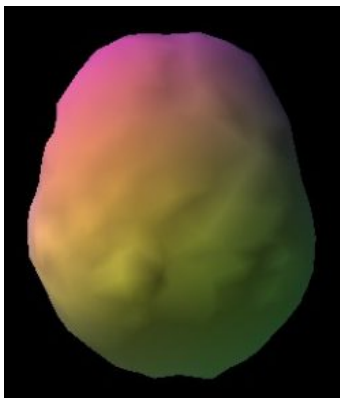
A [2017 report](#) on the health effects of cannabis cautions that pot use can have serious psychiatric consequences. Commissioned by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, the report points to research showing that using marijuana at an early age, as well as heavy and prolonged usage may increase the risk of triggering the first episode of psychosis.

[Psychosis](#) is characterized by losing touch with reality and may include symptoms, such as hallucinations or delusions. Each year, an estimated 100,000 adolescents and young adults experience [their first psychotic episode](#), according to the National Institute of Mental Health. And [research](#) shows that cannabis is involved in close to 50% of all cases of psychosis and some types of [schizophrenia](#). And when psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia, are already present in adolescents and young adults, marijuana use can worsen symptoms.

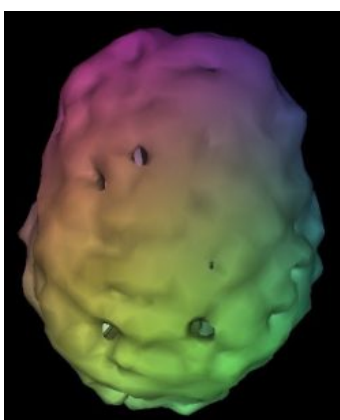
What's making the connection even more distressing is that the cannabis being sold today isn't the same as the weed from the peace and love era of the 1960s. Levels of THC (spell out) have been on the rise for decades, making the new cannabis products—from joints to edibles, tabs, and vaping systems—far more potent.

A [2019 study](#) in *The Lancet Psychiatry* shows why this is so concerning. This research confirms previous evidence showing that daily cannabis use and exposure at an early age increase the risk of experiencing a psychotic episode. Compared with people who had never tried cannabis, daily pot users were 3 times more likely to experience a psychotic episode. And the risk was higher in adolescents who started using the substance at age 15 or earlier.

What makes this study different from previous findings is that it looked at how using high-potency cannabis affects the risk of developing psychosis. The disturbing results showed that when compared to people who have never used marijuana, using the kind with high levels of THC nearly doubles the chances of experiencing a psychotic episode. Even worse, using high-potency pot on a daily basis increased the odds of a psychotic disorder by nearly 5 times. The researchers suggest that if high-potency cannabis were not available, as many as half of all first-episode psychosis cases could be prevented.



Healthy SPECT Surface Scan
(Top Down)



Marijuana SPECT Surface Scan
(Top Down)

How to Talk to Your Teen About Marijuana

Talking to your teen about drug use can be difficult. You don't want to come off sounding like you're preaching, and young people don't respond well to scare tactics or threats. One of the best ways you can start a conversation and help your teen understand how damaging marijuana can be is to do it with pictures. Show them brain scans of a healthy brain versus the brain of someone who is a regular cannabis user. Seeing is believing.

By sharing the images in this blog (you can find more brain scans of people with drug addiction [here](#)), you may be able to help them break their belief that pot is harmless. When teens see what substances can do to their brain function, it helps them develop brain envy. When young people realize that with a better brain comes a better life, they are more likely to want to take care of their brain with healthy habits.

Don't wait to start this important conversation with your teen. Their brain depends on it.

At Amen Clinics, we use brain SPECT imaging as part of a comprehensive evaluation to help our patients see and understand any underlying brain dysfunction. This is often a powerful first step to breaking the chains of substance use and addiction. We use an integrated brain-body approach to healing the brain and treating any co-occurring mental health problems.

If you want to help your teen join the thousands of people who have already enhanced their brain health and overcome their substance use and psychiatric symptoms at Amen Clinics, speak to a specialist today at 844-322-6442. If all our specialists are busy helping others, you can also [schedule a time to talk](#).

