

Marijuana. I can't believe that I am going there again and I am sure there are a few around who wish I wouldn't, but I guess that's the kind of hairpin I am.

A couple of months ago I expressed the opinion that legalizing marijuana is not a good idea. It was only my opinion, not shared by all, and that is why the legalization of marijuana is called a controversy. Some say yes, some say no, some don't care.

Some people were outraged at my misrepresentation of the facts. First of all, let me say that I research everything I write for this column and in this case I provided seven research sources for memory and motivational impairment to my publisher.

With regard to the effects of marijuana on the human body, there seems to be no doubt that the introduction of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) causes an immediate effect as it is carried through the bloodstream and through the body's organs into the brain. The cannabinoid receptors on the surface of the nerve cells in the brain are associated with pleasure, memory, cognition, concentration, movement, and sensory function. THC overstimulates the receptors and impairs function.

The concern is that marijuana potency has been steadily increasing over the past 30 years, so naturally the effect of THC is more powerful. The effects of a more potent version of the drug on young people whose brains are still developing is cause for alarm.

In addition to a stronger form of marijuana, there is a street version of marijuana with an additive of a dissociative anesthetic called Phencyclidine (PCP), sometimes referred to as Angel Dust. This is a product that was shelved in the 50's for being unsafe for medical use.

One of the common ways to use Angel Dust is to sprinkle it on marijuana and some suppliers sell it as Love Boat or Killer Weed. PCP causes severe hallucinations and delirium as well as euphoria, loss of inhibitions, anxiety, disorientation, and disorganized thinking. An extreme reaction can cause coma, violence, paranoia and some very serious physiological reactions.

Many users report residual effects such as depression, confusion and feeling out of control. Now PCP is not marijuana, but the incidence of combining the two for sale on the street is well-documented. It is widely available in large gatherings such as raves and concerts.

A person who has smoked marijuana may be disoriented, dizzy and unstable on his feet, may laugh uncontrollably for no reason, may have red or bloodshot eyes. He may have difficulty remembering what just happened or forget what he is saying in mid-sentence. Perception becomes distorted, heart rate increases, anxiety may set in, and some people may become paranoid.

As with alcohol, which is a legal drug, reactions vary. Some people can handle alcohol and others destroy their lives.

This column is entitled 'Family Life.' My perspective is always about what is good for the family and what is good for the parents and what keeps kids safe.