

JOSEPH A. PURSCH, M.D.

Addiction Medicine & Psychiatry



'Recreational' Marijuana Use May Become an Addiction

If you think you may be hooked on pot, why not listen to baby-boomer Jerry Rubin, one of the gurus of the 1960's?

"We believed that drugs would be a liberating force," Rubin told the Wall Street Journal. "They've turned out to be a nightmare." A recent Time/Yankelovich poll bears him out. Thirty-four percent of baby-boomers say that during the '60's, they regularly used marijuana. Today, only 11 percent of them do.

Why are they "disenchanted"? Because, over the years, they have seen many of their friends get hooked on pot even though they used to call themselves "recreational users."

Clinically, marijuana addicts eventually spend most of their time smoking pot, hiding the consequences, staying close to their dealer and keeping a job to pay for their pot. As it is with any other addiction, the drug gradually consumes the addict i.e. relationships, hobbies, even good nutrition go by the wayside.

Harry, a junior executive who is now clean, sober and in treatment for several months, says, "For years I thought I had no problem. My rationale was that I used pot sparingly during the week. The trouble was that weekends became one long party. Sunday nights I'd feel depressed because I had to stop. (I had discovered that smoking pot late in the evening dulled my thinking the next morning. So I'd substitute a couple of beers - which often turned into a six-pack.)"

On Monday mornings Harry would feel hung over at work. He could hardly wait for his noon pot break. "Sometimes I'd feel so bad I'd have to sneak out to my car for a joint by 11 a.m. That's practically no time away from the job, I would re-assure myself. Then I'd gargle, spit the mouthwash on the ground, sprinkle shaving lotion on my chest and use eye drops." (This ritual became a necessary after-lunch precaution because one afternoon the boss, after leaning over Harry's desk, had looked at him kind of

funny. Did he smell pot? Harry had wondered at the time.)

A noon joint made the afternoon tolerable. Without marijuana, the boss' helpful advice sounded like nit-picking criticism. As for those afternoon policy meetings, well . . . they seemed interminable without a noon pot break.

"After work I'd hurry home where I could smoke pot in peace. My two roommates were construction workers. They would already be drinking beer, smoking pot and watching TV. It didn't matter what was on the screen. We'd just sit and kind of watch and smoke dope. If my girlfriend called, I'd put her off till the weekend. By 10 o'clock at night the last baggie would be gone. Then I'd get the munchies. Often there was nothing to eat except stale hamburger buns and some dried up pieces of chicken. So I'd have a few beers and pass out."

Harry's girlfriend finally brought him to the drug clinic because he was always loaded, and she no longer wanted to go on like this. "It's not just ruining our relationship," she told me, "Now it's affecting even his job. He used to love his work. Now he doesn't want to work, and soon he won't be able to work."

In our interview, Harry just sat there, a picture of miserable indifference. Under pressure, he decided not see her for a while and walked out of the session.

In the ensuing weeks he felt even more miserable. So, in order to get her to come back, he agreed to start outpatient counseling. Today he says "If I hadn't had to sober up to go to work every morning, I'd never have done anything but smoke pot. And if my girlfriend hadn't confronted me, I'd still be out there recreationally destroying my life."

Dr. Pursch's Office
949-499-5631

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www.drpursch.com