

Great discussion for mythbusters.

The answer to can marijuana cause dependency is not simply yes or no but a bit more nuanced.

The distinction between addiction and dependency is generally defined as behavioral and physical. The addicted person continues compulsive use of a substance despite negative consequences. Addiction has nearly as much to do with genetic predisposition as it has to do with the length of exposure. However, dependency is the physical adaptation of the brain to a substance to continue to function normally. When the substance is removed, then physical symptoms of withdrawal occur. The negative behavioral consequences of cannabis in some users are well defined in cannabis use disorder, but the physical effects are more nuanced. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th describes cannabis withdrawal as “mainly mood and behavioral symptoms of light to moderate intensity.” Though there will be a small cohort of patients who have more severe withdrawal, I submit that physical dependency on cannabis is not a significant concern.¹

Bonnet, et al. The cannabis withdrawal syndrome: current insights. Substance Abuse Rehabilitation 2017;8:9-37 published online

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