

It's a Fact: Marijuana is Safer Than Alcohol

Marijuana is objectively less harmful than alcohol, both for the consumer and the community. It is time states end the irrational policy of prohibiting adults from choosing the safer product.

Unlike marijuana use, alcohol use causes tens of thousands of deaths. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that more than 36,000 annual U.S. deaths are attributed to chronic alcohol use. The CDC does not even have a category for deaths caused by the use of marijuana.

People die from alcohol overdoses. There has never been a fatal marijuana overdose. Alcohol is one of the most toxic drugs and using just 10 times what one would use to get the desired effect could lead to death. There has never been a case of an individual dying from a marijuana overdose. Meanwhile, according to the CDC, hundreds of alcohol overdose deaths occur in the United States each year.

The health-related costs associated with alcohol use far exceed those for marijuana use. Health-related costs for alcohol consumers are eight times greater than those for marijuana consumers, according to an assessment published in the *British Columbia Mental Health and Addictions Journal* — \$165 per alcohol user, compared to \$20 per marijuana user.

Alcohol use damages the brain. Marijuana use does not. Despite the myths we've heard throughout our lives about marijuana killing brain cells, it turns out that a growing number of studies indicate that marijuana actually has neuroprotective properties (i.e., it works to protect brain cells). Meanwhile, it is widely recognized that alcohol use permanently damages brain cells.

Alcohol is more addictive than marijuana. Addiction researchers have consistently reported that marijuana is far less addictive than alcohol based on a number of factors. In particular, alcohol use can result in significant and potentially fatal physical withdrawal, whereas marijuana has not been found to produce any symptoms of physical withdrawal. Alcohol users are also much more likely to develop dependence and build tolerance.

Alcohol use increases the risk of injury to the consumer. Marijuana use does not. Research published in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* found that 36% of hospitalized assaults and 21% of all injuries are attributable to alcohol use by the injured person. Meanwhile, the *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* reported that lifetime use of marijuana is rarely associated with emergency room visits.

Alcohol use is a major factor in violent crimes. Marijuana use is not. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism estimates that 25-30% of violent crimes in the United States are linked to the use of alcohol. That translates to about 5,000,000 alcohol-related violent crimes per year. By contrast, the government does not even track violent acts specifically related to marijuana use, as the use of marijuana has not been associated with violence.

Alcohol use contributes to the likelihood of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Marijuana use does not. Alcohol is a major contributing factor in the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault. This is not to say that alcohol causes these problems; rather, its use makes it more likely that an individual prone to such behavior will act on it. For example, a study conducted by the Research Institute on Addictions found that among individuals who were chronic partner abusers, the use of alcohol was associated with significant increases in the daily likelihood of male-to-female physical aggression, but the use of marijuana was not.