

The Allergy & Asthma Clinic

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Newsletter

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Cannabis use increases need for asthma medication

The number of cannabis (marijuana) users in the United States was an estimated 24 million as of 2016. With the approval of the Marijuana Act in 2016, cannabis became legal in California starting Jan 1, 2018 and the number of users continues to rise. A recent study published by BMC Pulmonary Medicine indicated that smoking cannabis increases the risk of bronchial asthma and the need for asthma medication.

- What is bronchial asthma? Bronchial asthma is a long-term inflammatory disease of the airways.
- What are the symptoms? Coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness.
- What are risk factors for bronchial asthma? Allergies, respiratory infections, family history of asthma, environmental pollutants, smoking, female, and obesity.

The participants of the study were evaluated over a 13-year period. They found that respiratory function and asthma were negatively affected by the use of cannabis.

Another article in Preventive Medicine Reports discusses that smoking cannabis often occurs indoors, generating a higher concentration of air particles that can be inhaled by nonsmokers or children in the home. Exposure to these particulates will have a negative impact on those with the above risk factors, causing asthma exacerbations and requiring more or higher doses of medication.

The take home message here is that cannabis is a risk factor for bronchial asthma and increases the need for asthma medications. Smoking cannabis should be avoided in persons at risk including smoking in the same area as someone who may be at risk of an asthma exacerbation.

Smoke and environmental irritants increase the risk of chronic rhinitis

An estimated 500 million people suffer from allergic rhinitis worldwide. Chronic allergic rhinitis is a condition in which inflammation of the nasal membranes cause runny nose, nasal congestion, or sneezing that goes on for a long time.

A recent article published in The World Allergy Organizational Journal researched the effects of smoking, second hand smoke, and occupational irritants on chronic rhinitis in both men and women ages 20-69. They found that smoking was associated with nasal congestion and chronic rhinitis. When smoking was combined with exposure to other environmental irritants such as gas, fumes, or dust there was an increased harmful effect of chronic rhinitis. Out of the participants in the study, 36.9% reported chronic rhinitis. Some key points of the study indicate:

- Chronic rhinitis is more frequent among smokers and ex-smokers.
- Smoking has been associated with an increased risk of allergic disease.
- Second hand smoke alone was not a significant risk factor for chronic rhinitis (although it is for bronchial asthma).
- The combined effects of smoking and environmental irritants increase the incidence of COPD and chronic rhinitis.

Overall, the risks associated with chronic rhinitis can be prevented by smoking cessation and reduction of exposure to environmental irritants. If you or a loved one has questions as to how to treat chronic rhinitis, call us to schedule an appointment with one of our health care providers.