Dear Alice,

What are the effects of marijuana on libido and fertility? My boyfriend smokes like crazy, and although he has been smoking for a number of years, I am worried about him.

Signed,
Endo

Answer

Dear Endo,

Marijuana (also frequently called weed and pot) has a wide range of physiological, psychological, and behavioral effects attributable to the many compounds of which it's composed. Historically considered an aphrodisiac, pot actually has a complex relationship with sex. As for whether marijuana affects libido (a.k.a. sex drive or sexual desire) and fertility, the research on both of these topics has had mixed findings. While it may affect libido, there are many other factors that play a role in determining whether it boosts or dampens the flames of desire. Additionally, marijuana may affect testosterone levels, but studies aren't clear as to whether it'll increase or decrease them. To sort through all of this and get more details on the effects that marijuana has on libido and fertility, keep on reading!

Time for the low-down on libido: In recent surveys on the self-reported effects of marijuana, one third of people report that sex is a key factor in their decision to use weed. These respondents stated that marijuana intensified sexual experiences by enhancing libido, control of ejaculation, and touch sensitivity and by lowering inhibitions. However, other respondents reported that pot made them lose interest in sex, feel too lethargic for sex, or feel too self-conscious to enjoy it. And still others reported no difference between sex with and without prior weed use. Another survey claimed that the majority of users feel horny after smoking and that 66 percent of subjects reported having marijuana increase the duration of a sexual experience. On the other hand, other respondents in the survey blamed pot for either losing interest in sex or being unable to have an orgasm at least once during sex while under the influence. These studies show that weed affects people’s libido very differently, with it increasing for some and decreasing for others, so your
boyfriend might fall into any of these categories.

It's worth noting that most of the reported negative effects are from cannabis use in higher doses, while most of the reported positive effects are from lower doses of use. Also of note is that researchers are starting to believe that any of the psychological effects, or differences in perception of experiences, reported by pot users may actually be a result of marijuana's effect on the body. For example, weed has an effect on both time perception and feelings of anxiety, so those who report more endurance during sex may actually be feeling less anxious and time-conscious, indicating an impression of a longer, heightened period of sex as opposed to a reality of such.

As for physiological health effects, recent research is inconclusive as to how marijuana affects the testosterone levels of adults, but it may result in a potential reduction in sperm production. There's no clear evidence of infertility in people assigned male at birth who smoke pot. The effect on sperm production appears to be temporary and reversible when the smoker abstains, although the research is inconclusive overall. Some evidence suggests that cannabis use may lead to a change in testosterone levels, but certain studies show an increase while others show a decrease, meaning, once again, the evidence is inconclusive.

It’s unclear if you’re specifically concerned about sexual desire and fertility in your relationship due to your beau’s marijuana use. If you are, have you noticed changes in your sex life with your boyfriend? Has his marijuana use patterns changed in any way? Have you discussed any concerns with him directly? If you haven’t, you may consider having an honest conversation about your concerns and offer any support if he has interest in exploring his relationship with marijuana further. If you or your boyfriend are worried about his substance use, you might consider speaking with a health care provider, mental health professional, or health promotion specialist, or encouraging him to do so. For more information about the effects of marijuana, see the Moderate marijuana use and health effects? and the other related Q&As.

Alice!
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Marijuana, Hash, & Other Cannabis
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Resources
Medical Services (Morningside)
[16] https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/mental-health-services-cuimc