Marijuana and sex

Dear Alice,

Does the use of marijuana affect a person's sexual performance?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Will marijuana put a hex on sex? Ought smoking pot make it heavy and hot? No matter how you frame it, the answer to these questions is simply: maybe. Research shows both positive and negative effects of cannabis (also called marijuana, weed, and pot) use on sexual performance, meaning one’s marijuana-infused sexual experience likely depends on the people involved. Stick around for more information on the relationship between weed and sexual performance.

Marijuana’s effect on the performance of any activity (whether it be socializing, skydiving, or sex) can vary person-to-person. While some may feel more calm or mellow after using it, others may feel more anxious or paranoid. Although these factors contribute to a variety of possible reactions to pot use, certain effects remain fairly consistent across the board. For example, using marijuana can impair both coordination and judgment, much like alcohol. So, making safer decisions and communicating clearly about sexual behavior might be difficult while high, and some may notice that their sexual interactions are fumble-filled. After all, sex can take a lot of coordination, even while completely sober!

Most studies conducted about the relationship between marijuana use and sexual performance have historically indicated strong correlations. However, more recent studies offer a different perspective: they note that cannabis use doesn’t have a direct impact on sexual performance. Rather, smoking weed can lead to side effects that are experienced regardless of whether you’re engaging in sexual activity, and those side effects are, in fact, what seem to impact a person’s sexual experience and performance. For example, many report an increase in sexual arousal and tactile sensitivity during sexual activities after marijuana use. This may actually be explained by marijuana’s tendency to slow temporal perception. The slowing of temporal perception can also make periods of time seem longer than they really are, so a person may perceive that the sexual experience lasted longer than it really did and that their endurance has increased. There may be another weed-related explanation for the perceived sensitivity cannabis users often
report during sexual encounters — many experience anxiolytic (anti-anxiety) effects after use. The more relaxed a person is, the more they may be able to pay attention to their senses. Finally, they may have perceived that their experience was more positive as opposed to the same type of experience where marijuana wasn't used. This may not have been due to the drug itself, but the belief that it was, which is commonly described as the placebo effect. Cannabis has long been rumored to be an aphrodisiac, so those who believe this to be true may be more inclined to confirmation bias (confirming evidence as true based on prior beliefs) when experiencing these effects themselves.

Despite the recent rise in theories about the indirect relationship between marijuana use and sexual experience, there’s still little to no conclusive evidence available about the direct relationship between marijuana and sex. Large-scale studies on this topic are limited, as most research about marijuana and sex focuses on effects that cannabis use has on fertility (and on animals, at that). Unfortunately, research related to your question predominantly relies on surveys and anecdotal experience. That's not to say these reports are worthless, however; they actually shed light on some of the negative effects that marijuana use has on sexual encounters, such as higher rates of erectile dysfunction, diminished sexual desire, and difficulty reaching orgasm. Further, there’s reportedly less condom use in sexual encounters involving cannabis, regardless of the amount consumed, which increases the likelihood of pregnancy as well as contracting or passing sexually transmitted infections.

Above all, there’s no way to predict how pot might influence people’s sexual experiences, or those of anyone else. However, if you're considering having sex while using marijuana, you may be able to figure out its effect by exploring your response to marijuana in nonsexual situations, or by discussing marijuana's role in your sex life with your partner. In the end, you may find that relaxing during sexual encounters and getting turned on may be possible without the use of drugs. Fortunately, you have the power to choose their role in your life and in the bedroom!

Alice!

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