

School Of Public Health Study Finds Use of Marijuana Increases Risk of Metabolic Syndrome

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ATLANTA—The longer a person uses marijuana, the more the risk increases for developing conditions linked to heart disease, stroke and diabetes, according to a recent study by researchers in the School of Public Health at Georgia State University.

“Duration of marijuana use seems to be a significant factor associated with metabolic syndrome,” the researchers said.

Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of symptoms that increase a person’s risk for heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

The study found that “every year increase in marijuana use is associated with at least a 5 percent increase in odds of having metabolic syndrome.”

To examine the relationship between marijuana use and metabolic syndrome, the researchers gathered data on 3,051 adults age 20 and older from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2011-2012. The survey included subjects who reported using marijuana or hashish even once during their lifetimes. Participants were classified as regular marijuana users if they responded they had used marijuana at least once a month for more than a year. The relationship of their years of marijuana use with metabolic syndrome was assessed in the study using different criteria for defining metabolic syndrome.

The study noted that the most common form of marijuana consumption is smoking, but the original survey also included participants who consumed edible marijuana products and hashish. It did not ask participants to specify how they used marijuana.

The research results are published in the *Journal of Addiction Research & Therapy* in the article “Relationship between Years of Marijuana Use and the Four Main Diagnostic Criteria for Metabolic Syndrome among United States Adults.” The study’s lead author is Barbara Yankey, a Ph.D. student in the School of Public Health.

While criteria for diagnosing metabolic syndrome are not settled, there are four commonly accepted signs of the disease: high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high concentrations of fat in the blood and excess abdominal fat.

“Irrespective of the criteria for metabolic syndrome, each year of marijuana use showed increased odds of having metabolic syndrome,” the researchers said. “This may constitute an important pathway between marijuana use and cardiovascular disease in later life.”

Marijuana is a psychoactive drug that induces relaxation and euphoria and is illegal under federal law. By the end of 2016, 28 states had legalized marijuana for medical use, and eight states and the District of Columbia had permitted recreational use of marijuana, according to the study.

The study's authors also include Georgia State public health faculty members Dr. Ike S. Okosun, Dr. Richard Rothenberg, Dr. Sheryl Strasser and Dr. Kim Ramsey-White.