

Marijuana use isn't harmless

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"In the debate over legalizing marijuana, the health risks of the drug are often overlooked," said Itai Danovitch. The California ballot initiative to legalize the drug—which would produce a big drop in its price and a surge in its use—states that cannabis "is not addictive" and has no "long-term toxic effects." As a neuroscientist and psychiatrist who treats addictions, I can tell you this is simply not true. A large body of scientific research has found that about 9 percent of adults who smoke marijuana become dependent on it—unable to quit even when getting stoned negatively affects their jobs and relationships. Among those who start smoking weed regularly under the age of 18, twice that percentage become addicted. Many people use marijuana to self-medicate their depression and anxiety, but research shows long-term use actually makes these problems worse. Long-term use has been shown to slow the processing of complex information; brain scans show a deterioration of memory and learning. Should pot be legalized? That's a political question. But let's not pretend marijuana is some kind of magical, benign drug.