We’re all aware of marijuana. The green herbal plant that is consumed in many different forms from flower to extracts to get the chemical from the plant. Other terms for the plant are weed, pot, grass, bud, and ganja. Marijuana is primarily used by smoking, ingesting, drinking or inhaling vapors. Ways to consume are joints, vapes, bongs, and edibles. Upon use, there’s a euphoric feeling when ‘high’. It’s the THC, the primary cannabidiol chemical that stimulates the brain cells to release the reward chemical, dopamine. Dopamine is the “pleasure center” part of the brain. THC attaches to carbenoid receptors in the brain which regulates movement, coordination and memory. CBD is the secondary cannabinoid, found in medical marijuana use that doesn’t induce a high that has ongoing research still to discover what it truly does from a pure-use standpoint. Common claims for CBD are it’s known as a relief of physical or mental pains.

Marijuana is on the rise among 18 to 25-year old. As times are changing with state legalization of marijuana, there’s an increased use among college students. The Grand Valley AOD website says it’s assumed 82% of college students use marijuana in the past 30 days when really only 19% of students have used it.

This common misconception may lead to the extension of popularity as students find marijuana as a commonly used substance among the college crowds.

Hello, welcome back to “In the Mix,” through the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services here at Grand Valley. I’m Zachary Plisko, your host for season 2, episode 2. As mentioned in the previous episode, we’ll discuss various topics of alcohol and other drugs within the college environment. I’m here to inform listeners to be safe, be responsible and be smart if they use substances. On today’s episode, we’ll be discussing the motivations for marijuana use among college students, issues with smoking marijuana, the cost of using marijuana, and how to safely consume marijuana.

One motivation for marijuana use is it serves as a mental health relief.

College is a lot to adapt to and stress can immensely affect students. Marijuana is seen as a relaxation tool or coping mechanism to calm down or take a break from all the outside forces. Often, students need time to forget their worries, blow off steam or feel less anxious. Whether it’s a lot of school work, at your job working extra, balancing both school, and work, the list goes on with the stress students have to handle on a daily basis.

Though marijuana is seen as the getaway tool, it can increase symptoms of anxiety or depression, especially during withdrawal. The American Addiction Center says, students who use marijuana daily and attempt to give it up within a week could find themselves more irritable and deal with extreme nervousness.

If you want help or more information on marijuana, the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services provides a Marijuana eCheckup. It’s an assessment for users that will ask many questions about your relationship with marijuana and at the end of the assessment, it’ll suggest further actions to take if you wish to seek help. Another option is the Marijuana Education Workshop. It’s an awareness class to educate groups or individuals about concerns with marijuana. For more information, go to gvsu.edu/aod/aod-services.

Students also use marijuana for social conformity purposes.

In the previous episode of, “In the Mix,” we discussed the influence of alcohol with peer pressure. Marijuana can do the same as a statistic from the University of Michigan Prevention Center says, 48% of college students reported obtaining marijuana through individuals sharing it or giving it for free. With marijuana, students feel the need to be with groups of people to socialize as a destresser like, similar to going out and getting a drink. As it’s offered to individuals, there’s a fear of saying no as they won’t be accepted into the common group of those kicking back and relaxing with marijuana use, so students use it to feel apart. Social norms one could argue that it’s changed where it’s believed that marijuana is harmless when there’s still consequences that many overlooks to its organic perception. As groups view it as a destresser, others may feel the need to consume marijuana in order to fit in with the destressing groups.

There’s a notion that marijuana use is, “part of the college experience.” Students must use it to cross it off the college to do list. From being in areas where marijuana isn’t allowed and frowned upon, college social environments are more accepting and open up possibilities to try the substance out. Having the perception that many students use marijuana, it could lead to an increased use. By believing everyone uses it, the assumption is it’s a friendly substance that’s welcomed by many, when in reality it’s not.

Despite societal norms leaving college students false assumptions to use marijuana, some students simply find themselves bored and wanting to try something new.

A third of college students use marijuana to try it out for experimentation purposes, according to the Drug Free Organization. Students may question… What does it feel like to be ‘high’? Will it relax me? Will I sleep better? So many questions, but users have different experiences. The euphoric feeling is the THC achieving the peak. Students may experience hunger. Hunger is a mechanism behind THC that enhances smell and taste through the increase of ghrelin, a hormone associated with hunger. This leads to an increased appetite and continuous eating. Some may feel branched from reality. Depending on the concentration of THC, it can connect with indica strains of relaxation while sativa strains produce a more active high. Hybrid strains can combine for mixed feelings of indica and sativa. Again, it’s different for everyone. As for sleep, the AOD website shares that marijuana before bed can decrease the amount of REM sleep a person is able to get. REM sleep is the increased activity of the brain which helps memory or learning. So, sleeping better? Scientifically no, but the feeling of being ‘high’ may seem like you’re getting great sleep.

Though boredom can increase a person's willingness to try marijuana, let’s see how legalization and more dispensaries lead to increased availability.

Everyone knows that Michigan recently legalized marijuana on November 6, 2018. Popularity skyrocketed as 12 dispensaries are in Grand Rapids alone. More stores mean increased availability of cannabis. This leaves for those of the age limit 21 to successfully buy marijuana with less repercussions. Which could lead to those under 21 having more access as people over 21 can buy it for them. Much like alcohol.

Remember though federally, marijuana is still illegal, however, with state legalization a perception is built that the substance is harmless, though many careers still drug tests for THC.

There’s a view of marijuana now that it’s legal and that it must be safe. This idea stems from the state legalization of the substance as there’s new attitudes towards the drug. Students must be on the lookout though because there’s a higher concentration of marijuana than ever before. Let’s break down the different ways to consume marijuana and the level of concentration it has.

Edibles are consumed by eating something that contains THC or CBD or both. Oil can be cooked into the food which achieves the high. Often, edibles vary in concentration, it depends how much is put into food or gummies. Edibles are processed in the body differently than smoking. Less THC is absorbed but the effects last longer and take longer to kick in.

Vapes can contain dabs which are tiny concentrates of THC and work the same as regular vape pens. Vapes can be 60% to 80% concentrated.

Shatter is the heaviest concentration of cannabis through oil and is also considered a dab. It deprives the highest THC in a cannabis plant and makes a transparent glass like texture. Concentration is upwards to 90% with shatter use.

Marijuana is less addictive than alcohol and opioids, but psychological addiction is possible. For heavy marijuana users, there’s a chance of physical withdrawal if stopping usage. Usually the withdrawal begins 24 hours after cannabis cessation. The peak hits in two to four days and begins to subside one to three weeks. Symptoms over this time period can include anorexic effects, increased aggression or anger, and restlessness of sleep.

There are beliefs that you can’t overdose on marijuana. That’s not completely true. Toxicity is possible, especially with a high concentration of THC, it’s known as “greening out”. Symptoms of this can be increased heart rate, hallucinations, loss of body movements, dizziness, and nausea.

Let’s go over some safe ways of marijuana if students use it after describing various ways to consume marijuana and the symptoms of use.

Marijuana is still being researched today, unless it’s for medical use, there’s no specific dosage for recreational use. However, it’s recommended to use small doses of marijuana and wait. Often, students who try marijuana assume they’ll get the euphoric feeling right away and consume more and more. Just be patient. Usually if smoked, it can take up to two hours to feel the THC kick in. When students take more than they should, it causes a bad experience. The physical and psychoactive effects can be way more intense than the student anticipates which leads to a bad rest of the night, and possibly linger into the next day.

Finally, we’ll go over the costs of marijuana for college students.

Some college students may be walking the line and budget out paying for classes, groceries, gas if they have a car, and more. Marijuana can add to those costs as the per ounce of marijuana has increased. During 2019, in Michigan, the price jumped from $232.18 in the first half of the year and towards December prices were upwards to $306.21 a statistic from the State Marijuana Regulatory Agency. On average, cannabis users spend $645 on marijuana products in a year. That’s only for dispensaries as the number could vary at street costs.

Again, students need to question if the money they have allotted fits marijuana in the budget. Is it worth getting for the high prices? Decide if the benefits outweigh the costs for you.

That is all for the second episode of season two of, “In the Mix.” Remember marijuana has different feelings for all users with different effects and consequences. If used, be sure to use small amounts to start and wait a bit of time before consuming more. Until next time, I’m Zachary Plisko.