

## **“In The Mix” With AOD Episode Thirteen- Let’s Be Safe With Marijuana**

Hey everyone, what's up? I'm Bethann Long back with another episode of “In The Mix” With AOD, a podcast provided by the Alcohol and Other Drugs here at Grand Valley. We are just weeks away from wrapping up this semester and another school year. I can't believe how fast this year has gone and summer is finally in sight! With the weather warming up, this is a really exciting time to get together with friends and enjoy the outdoors. This time of year can also be really stressful with classes coming to an end and exam week coming in quick, but I hope you are all taking some time for yourself and finding a balance between school work and self care. In this episode, we are going to be discussing marijuana, a substance growing in usage rates among college students. We are going to go into more detail about what exactly marijuana is, the effects to expect when experimenting, methods of consumption, the increase in potency over the course of decades, the dangers of mixing alcohol and marijuana, and when cannabis use disorder can develop. We have a jam packed episode so let's get into it?

So what exactly is marijuana? This is a drug that comes from the cannabis plant that is native to Central or South Asia. Marijuana is used by smoking, eating, drinking, or inhaling vapors or applying to the skin. Two components of marijuana include THC and CBD. THC is the active, mind-altering ingredient in marijuana that causes the high effect. Over the years, the amount of THC in marijuana has increased drastically. CBD is the part of the plant that does not get you high or change your consciousness. This can cause a feeling of relaxation and decreased pain levels. When experimenting with marijuana, there are some immediate effects that will occur and even some long term effects that can develop as well. Some immediate effects include:

- Impairment of cognition and coordination
- Anxiety and psychotic symptoms
- Dry mouth and dry eyes
- Fatigue
- Increased appetite

Some long term effects include:

- Cannabis dependence or Cannabis Use Disorder
- Higher rate of developing mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder, or even exacerbation of preexisting mental health conditions
- Decreased respiratory function

As mentioned earlier, marijuana is much more potent now than it was even when our parents were growing up, and is also being used in new ways that's aimed at getting a stronger and longer-lasting high. Studies have found that the potency of marijuana has been on the rise

every year since the 1970's, and THC levels have increased by approximately 5.7 milligrams each year from 1975 to 2017. According to the National Library of Medicine, prior to the 1990's the THC content was less than 2%, which later grew to 4%. Then, between 1995 and 2015, there was a whopping 212% increase in the THC content in the marijuana flower. Originally when scientists began studying marijuana, it was classified as a hallucinogen and was thought to not cause addiction because there were no identified withdrawal symptoms. However, due to the increased potency of THC there has been definite recognized withdrawal symptoms that we will go into later when discussing Cannabis Use Disorder.

While experimenting with marijuana has increased in popularity, the number of methods of consumption have also increased. Smoking is the most common way people consume marijuana. This includes smoking joints, which are homemade cigarettes, blunts which are hollowed out cigars filled with marijuana, bongs which are glass water pipes, and hookahs. Vaping is another really common way of consuming marijuana. This is using devices that vaporize the active ingredients. Tons of people are choosing to use vaporizers because they claim to allow the user to inhale marijuana without some of the harmful or irritating health risks most commonly associated with smoking a blunt or joint. Dabs are a concentrated form of cannabis made by extracting THC using a solvent like carbon dioxide. Dabs are heated on a hot surface and smoked in a dab rig. These concentrated forms of THC are generally more potent and create a more intense high. Edibles are made from the oils concentrated from marijuana. Edibles can be considered anything that is made with marijuana but popular ones include brownies, cakes, cookies, gummy bears, and chocolate. When it comes to choosing the safest way of consuming marijuana, vaporizers are considered to be the safest. Vaping removes approximately 95 percent of the smoke that is inhaled so it is not as harsh on the lungs, and toxins from the papers aren't being inhaled either. This method also ensures that you know how much marijuana you are consuming.

Now, many people may choose to use marijuana over alcohol because they believe it can be less harmful in the long run. However, there are still risks of severe addiction with this substance, referred to as Cannabis Use Disorder. Regular or heavy use of marijuana can result in the development of high tolerance and dependence on the substance, leading to a person needing more and more marijuana to achieve the same effects. The risk of developing a Cannabis Use Disorder is greater in those who start using marijuana during their youth or adolescence and those who use it more frequently. Signs of Cannabis Use Disorder include:

- Using more marijuana than intended
- Trying but failing to quit using
- Craving marijuana
- Using marijuana even though it causes problems at home, school or work

- Continuing to use marijuana despite social or relationship problems
- Using in high risk situations such as while driving a car
- Needing to use more to get the same high
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when stopping

According to researchers they have yet to know the full extent of the consequences when the body and brain are exposed to high concentrations of THC or how recent increases in concentrations affect the risk of someone developing Cannabis Use Disorder.

In college, whether you are at a party or just hanging out with close friends, it's become more common to mix marijuana and alcohol together. At the time, it may not seem like a huge deal, but mixing these two together can have some dangers that many aren't aware of. Both marijuana and alcohol are depressant drugs so their effects suppress, impair and inhibit the brain's ability to function as it should. When mixed together, the effects of these individual substances become exaggerated. The more alcohol and marijuana consumed, the more distorted our senses become. Drinking alcohol before smoking marijuana can ramp up the effects of the active ingredient of THC. Ethanol in alcohol and THC both work on the same parts of the brain that affect our self control, decision making, judgment, reflexes, movement, perception of time, and emotions. The more alcohol and marijuana that is consumed means the more distorted our senses become. Someone who frequently mixes marijuana and alcohol together will be less sensitive to the drugs' combined effects than an occasional or first time user. Short term impacts of mixing these substances include:

- Impaired cognitive ability
- Poor judgment
- Slowed reflexes
- Slowed breathing
- Change in heart rate
- Inability to make important decisions
- Short term memory loss when under the influence

Long term danger of mixing these substances include:

- Tolerance to both marijuana and alcohol which leads to the need for increasing amount of each substance
- Dependence to both substances
- Mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression
- Short term and long term memory loss

During your time in college, there is so much experimentation that happens and you may feel as though you want to participate. The most important thing is understanding the effects of substances such as marijuana and using it in a responsible manner. If you find

yourself with questions about marijuana use or feel as though you are struggling with your usage, the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services office is always open to talk and provide you with the proper resources. Well guys this has been the last episode of “In The Mix” With AOD, I can’t believe the year has gone by this quickly! I hope you all end this semester on a high note and have such an amazing summer, and I will be back next year with another season of “In The Mix”!