

# *Cannabis and Conception: Marijuana's Effects on Fertility*

Cannabis, aka marijuana, is often perceived as a less harmful substance that does not have much of an effect on fertility. However, new research suggests that cannabis may negatively impact fertility. Though the effects of smoking or consuming cannabis does not have a huge effect, it is still significant enough that doctors suggest patients who wish to conceive should avoid the substance during both pregnancy and the preconception stage.

## *What Does Marijuana Do to Fertility Chances?*

Many medical studies have found that regularly smoking cannabis lowers fertility chances. One study by the University of Buffalo found that semen volume and sperm counts were lowered for men who smoked cannabis about 14 times each week. There is also a decline in egg quality among women who smoke cannabis, and the psychoactive ingredients of cannabis also enter the uterus and affect sperm as they pass through the uterus. Most of the negative effects of cannabis were due to THC and the other cannabinoid compounds found in cannabis, so the fertility-lowering effects remain the same for people who smoke joints of cannabis mixed with tobacco, consume it in a baked good, inhale vaporized cannabis, or smoke it through a water pipe. Studies conclude that patients who are already nearly infertile become "functionally infertile" after using cannabis.

## *How Does Marijuana Influence Male Fertility?*

The main way that cannabis harms fertility is by affecting sperm count and sperm motility. Not only do men have overall lower sperm counts if they use cannabis regularly, but the sperm they do produce does not move to the egg properly. When sperm are exposed to THC as men ingest cannabis, they end up being ineffective by the time they reach the egg. This occurs because the sperm become hyperactive too quickly, so they are too tired to penetrate the thick coating of the egg by the time they reach it. The premature hyperactivity is caused because THC interferes with the signals that tell sperm the right time to start swimming hard.

## *How Does Marijuana Affect Women?*

Using cannabis has been linked to eggs that contain chromosomal abnormalities or other issues that prevent eggs from being fertilized and implanted in the uterus properly. The retarded development of embryos that have been exposed to cannabis can make miscarriages more likely in the early term, and these miscarriages typically occur within the first few weeks of conception. However, even if the egg is perfectly healthy, a woman can still significantly decrease her chances of conception by using cannabis. This happens because THC is present in the vagina, uterus and oviducts after being smoked. Therefore, sperm can be exposed to the THC and end up with motility issues, just like if the male had been the one using cannabis.

## *What Should You Do If You Use Smoke Marijuana and Want to Conceive?*

If you are interested in becoming pregnant and are worried about how cannabis may be negatively affecting your chances of conceiving, you will be happy to know that it might be possible to reverse the harmful results. According to one of the leaders of a medical study about sperm and cannabis, sperm quality should return to normal once the cannabis has completely left your system. Since cannabis is a fat-soluble compound that remains in the body for a while, it may take up to three months without consuming cannabis for all traces of the drug to disappear. Women who smoke cannabis seem to recover from the decreased fertility effects quicker than men do, possibly because it has less of an effect on female fertility overall.