Smoking marijuana for essential tremor disorder? [1]

Dear Alice,

A friend of mine has an essential tremor disorder. She smokes weed almost everyday because she said it helps her to stop shaking. She tried all kind of medicines doctors have prescribed her, and botox and acupuncture. None of them helped her. Any advice?

?very concerned about my friend

Answer

Dear Very Concerned,

Your friend is truly privileged to have someone who cares so much about her. While essential tremor disorder is not life-threatening, it may cause embarrassment and make it more difficult to perform activities of daily living, such as eating normally, talking, or writing. Essential tremor disorder can affect any part of the body. The tremors begin gradually, worsen with movement, and typically affect the hands, though the head and voice can be affected as well. These symptoms may get worse with emotional stress, fatigue, caffeine, or extremes in temperature.

Essential tremor disorder affects about 14 percent of individuals 65 and over. Although half of these cases occur because of a genetic mutation (familial tremor), it is unknown what contributes to the disorder in people without this mutation. Currently, there is no cure for essential tremor disorder, but therapies may include physical therapy, beta-blockers, or anti-convulsant drugs. In other cases, it may be helpful to eliminate stimulants from the diet, i.e., caffeine.

What may be more concerning is that your friend is smoking weed (aka marijuana, pot) everyday. Individuals who smoke weed may become addicted, which means that they need more and more of the drug to get the same "high." The American Academy of Family Physicians [2] mentions that marijuana use may actually cause tremors (shaking) and decreased coordination, along with the following common side effects:

- Trouble remembering things
- Slowed reaction time
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleepiness
- Anxiety
- Paranoia (feeling that people are "out to get you")
- Altered time perception
Red, bloodshot eyes

Moreover, marijuana may also have long-term health effects on the lungs? emerging research shows that smoking pot may even be associated with cancer. You may want to consider having a talk with your friend about why she smokes and whether she believes she is gaining anything from her marijuana use. While you can't force her to quit, you can express your concern and point out that the marijuana may be contributing to her tremors. If your friend is a student at Columbia and would like to speak with a health care provider about her tremors or her smoking, she can make an appointment by calling x4-2284 or visiting Open Communicator [3]. She can also see any provider from Counseling and Psychological Services [4] by calling x4-2878 to make an appointment.

For more resources, check out Wants to stop smoking pot [5] in the Go Ask Alice! alcohol and other drugs archives. What your friend is dealing with is no small matter, but she is certainly fortunate to have a concerned and supportive friend like yourself.

Good luck,

Alice!

Category:
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Published date:
Jul 31, 2009
Last reviewed on:
Aug 28, 2009
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