Marijuana ? Does it produce serotonin? [1]

Dear Alice,

My girlfriend tells me she uses marijuana to calm herself if she is having a stressful day. She has been doing this for many years. She says smoking pot is like self-medicating ? it is better than using anti-depressants. She also claims smoking pot helps with depression because of how it helps produce serotonin in the body. What is serotonin and how does it help depression? Does smoking pot really help with managing your anxiety, depression, etc.?

Thank you,
A very concerned boyfriend

Answer

Dear A very concerned boyfriend,

Marijuana (also known as pot or weed), serotonin, and antidepressants all have unique effects in the body, and mapping out what these substances do may be helpful in understanding your girlfriend?s self-medication. Serotonin, a chemical neurotransmitter, acts as a natural mood stabilizer (among other bodily functions). When these neurotransmitters become imbalanced, they have been correlated with depression. To help regulate the neurotransmitters, some take certain antidepressants, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). In the body, serotonin is synthesized from tryptophan, an amino acid found in certain foods (among other places) but not marijuana. Instead, the relaxing effects of smoking weed are due to a different set of substances, namely tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol. While lighting up may help lighten the mood for some, it may be worth a visit to a mental health professional or health care provider for your girlfriend to discuss her depression and explore alternative methods to treat it.

First, a bit more about serotonin: it plays a role in quite a few bodily functions. It?s found in the brain, blood, the stomach, and mucous membranes that line the digestive tract. It helps regulate all sorts of functions, such as mood, anxiety, nausea, blood clotting, libido, sleeping, wound healing, bone health, and bowel movements. In terms of mood regulation, balanced levels of serotonin are associated with feeling happier, calmer, more focused, and more stable. Some natural ways to get serotonin include being in the sun, meditating, being physically active, and snacking on certain foods. However, for some people living with depression and anxiety, antidepressant medication may be prescribed by a medical professional to help balance serotonin levels. Those who are depressed tend to have below
As a partner, learning more about effective coping strategies can help you better support your
girlfriend? so kudos to you for seeking out more information and clarity. If you’re concerned about your loved one’s marijuana use for the purpose of stress management, you may decide to talk with your girlfriend about it that if she’s interested, you can explore alternative ways to manage stress together. Perhaps if you share this information with your girlfriend, she may be more interested in trying a few different coping strategies, sans marijuana. If you do suggest that she visits a provider, you could offer to go with her to offer more comfort and support.

Take care,

Alice!

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