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# Fort Bend County Podcasts

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## Podcast Episode 54 – The Effects of THC

February 26, 2026

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**Gina:** Welcome to this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

**Wendy:** And I'm Wendy. And joining us today is Marti Montoya, a clinical consultant with All One Health.

Gina: Welcome, Marty.

Marti: Thank you, Gina and Wendy. Good to be here.

Wendy: Marty, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do at All One Health?

Marti: Sure. Yeah. I am a licensed professional counselor and clinical senior consultant at All One Health, and I do a variety of things. I do training, I do mediations, I work with clients to help them identify how to best support their employees, and I've been in the EAP realm for over ten years. I've been a counselor for twenty years, and I don't really work with clients directly very much these days, but I used to have private practice where I did work with clients directly.

Gina: Oh, that's awesome! So, today's topic for our podcast is THC. Now compare that to cannabis and marijuana and everything like that in case those people out there do not know what THC is. Marti, can you tell us what is THC?

Marti: So, the marijuana plant or the cannabis sativa plant, marijuana is referring to the leaves and the flowers and the stems of that plant. They have over a 100 different chemical compounds and THC tetrahydrocannabinol is the one, component of THC or of, cannabis that provides that euphoric and slightly stimulating effect that people look for when they turn to marijuana.

Wendy: What are the real-world safety risks you see for any user?

Marti: I am glad you asked that. There are several risks involved in using THC or marijuana. Because THC does impair brain function, there are psychomotor risks, so our capacity to perceive, coordinate ourselves, and react to anything that we're confronted with. This is a problem when driving of course. It is associated with slower breaking, poor lane control, reduced situational awareness, and all that increases the likelihood of an accident. And according to the CDC data, cannabis can make the heart beat faster and it can raise our blood pressure immediately after use. And that has the potential to contribute to risk of stroke, heart disease, and vascular events. And vascular means, you know, our blood vessels, arteries, things like that.



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**Marti:** Also, for some, THC can increase the risk of psychosis, especially in younger users or those who have already a genetic vulnerability. For example, if someone has a family history of bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or schizoaffective disorder, THC can actually trigger those events for some people. Other real-world impacts, of course, are lung irritation, chronic bronchitis symptoms, and again higher cardiovascular risk. But cannabis can also cause anxiety and disorientation as well as ruminative and unpleasant thoughts for some users. So yeah, the higher the potency of THC and the frequency higher frequency use are linked to an increased anxiety, disorders and can worsen psychiatric symptoms if someone is already dealing with a mental health diagnosis. So, people who start using cannabis, which often I hear to self-medicate anxiety, tend to show higher levels of anxiety and panic like symptoms compared to, like, a recreational user. So, THC can expose and trigger paranoia as well, for some individuals. So, there's a lot, a lot of things there that, you know, one would want to avoid. There it's a risky drug to use.

**Gina:** Oh, wow. And I've heard, you know, like, people say, oh, well, so and so take it because it makes them calm down. It makes them so much calmer. Mhmm. It sounds like it wouldn't be like that.

**Marti:** Not for a lot of people. And so it really is an individual reaction, you know. But there are so many risks that I think that, you know, the effects that one is seeking from marijuana sometimes is not worth the risk, especially in safety sensitive situations.

**Gina:** Absolutely. Because, I mean, you can be falling and, you know, even if you're in a workplace situation and driving and that's right. Too many possibilities of injuries. Wow.

**Marti:** Yes. It affects parts of the brain that are responsible for learning, memory, decision making, our emotions, our ability to pay attention and to be coordinated.

**Wendy:** And what are the short-term risks that can happen the same day someone uses THC?

**Marti:** So once THC is ingested or smoked, through marijuana, it can make the heart beat faster immediately, and so which is a very uncomfortable situation. It kind of can lead to some panic for some people. It raises our blood pressure also immediately after use. So, that increased blood pressure can also be compounded by the irritants that are in cannabis smoke, which are similar to those in tobacco smoke, and it stresses the cardiovascular system. So, it can contribute to higher cardiovascular risk when used frequently or smoked.

**Gina:** So, Marti, when we're talking about the THC, does the method matter of ingesting, whether it's smoking or vaping or even edible when it comes to heart risk?

**Marti:** So, the method of how you use cannabis does matter, when it comes to cardiovascular risk. So different delivery methods expose our body to different substances, absorption rates, and physiological effects. So, what the evidence shows, it's consistently linked with the most concerning heart related effects.



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So daily cannabis smoking is associated with significantly increased risk of heart attack by twenty five percent, in fact. And then, also of stroke by forty two percent. So those are pretty high percentages when we're talking about just recreational use or, you know, people who start doing daily smoking. So, cannabis smoke contains many of the same harmful substances as tobacco smoke, which affect both the lungs and the cardiovascular system. And these toxins are released when cannabis is burned, similar to smoking tobacco, and this may contribute to increased heart attack and stroke risk. So, smoking poses the highest cardiovascular risk due to both THC effects and toxic combustion products in the in the cannabis itself.

Marti: Vaping does reduce the toxin exposure, but the rapid THC delivery means heart rate is going to go up and blood pressure will still spike, So, edibles, of course, avoid that, the smoke toxins. So, they may reduce some of that cardiovascular risk, but THC affects heart rate and blood pressure, especially with high doses.

Gina: Oh, and I know that some people have that mentality of saying because I'm not a smoker, I believe that edibles are safer. So, what do you think on that?

Marti: So, I'll say edibles are safer than smoking only in the sense that they avoid the smoke related lungs and vascular damage, but they are not risk free. They carry different types of risks. So sometimes serious involving the heart, digestion, our mental health, and accidental overconsumption, which is really a poison once it's overconsumed. And that's how our body responds to it. You don't get carbon monoxide exposure or exposure to particulate matter and combustion byproducts. But heart attack and stroke are still a risk. And you're still impacting your vascular system with that increased heart rate and blood pressure. So, when eaten, THC converts to something called eleven hydroxy THC. It's a metabolite that is actually more potent than smoked THC. So, this increases the risk of, severe anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia, and psychotic episodes in those vulnerable individuals that I mentioned earlier that might have a history in their family of, some serious mental health conditions.

Marti: So, severe or too much THC reactions from edibles can last four to ten hours depending on the dose. And because edibles deliver THC slowly and convert it to the more potent metabolite, reaction tends to be stronger. So, it can take thirty minutes to two hours to start, and the psychoactive effects can last six to twelve hours, and residual effects can last up to twenty-four hours. So, it's actually impacting the body in more ways and for longer periods of twenty-four. And the danger is because it can take up to two hours for someone to feel the effects, they may not think they have enough for them to get high, and so they'll take more. And that's a very, very common way of overdose. And then of course having edibles in your possession or around your home or anywhere puts others at risk. They might not realize it's a drug and think it's candy.

Gina: Wow. So, basically, a person can be impaired, like, almost all day, if not all day.

Marti: Yeah. Oh, go ahead.

Gina: No. I was like, because if you really think about it, you know, that's your whole day.



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Marti: Yes. Right. And some people that have an addiction to it, you know, find that appealing. And there is, yeah, addiction is definitely also a huge risk factor. And the other thing I'll say about the edibles is, it can last up to twenty four hours, but people who use them regularly may not feel those effects, and they may think they're fine. But the THC is still impacting their brain function. So, that's the other risk is that, you know, someone may not feel high, but, that THC is still impacting brain function.

Gina: Oh my gosh. And people have to drive, you know, to get to point a to point b or take care of kids or

Marti: Exactly.

Gina: And you're gonna be impaired. Wow. That wow. That's good information.

Marti: Yeah. Yeah. it's good. I'm glad you guys are asking these questions.

Wendy: So, you mentioned heart attacks and strokes. What do you see with that THC usage in in younger adults? Or any adults?

Marti: Yeah, sure. So, there's very strong evidence from multiple large recent studies that show that people 50, especially those in their teens, twenties, and thirties, face significantly higher cardiovascular and mental health risk from cannabis compared to older adults. One study that was published last March from the Journal of American College of Cardiology, that relied on a lot of electronic medical records from the years, 2010 to 2018 on four point six million people ages 50 and younger. And they were all relatively healthy. They didn't use tobacco. They had normal blood pressure and cholesterol levels. And just two percent of that population, so ninety-two thousand of that four point six million used cannabis. Their average age was 26. During the three-year follow-up, cannabis users were six times more likely to experience a heart attack compared to the non-users. Also, the prevalence of both the depressive episodes and obesity, those are two conditions that are linked to heart risk, was much higher among the cannabis users.

Marti: Also, vascular function, so our blood vessels, arteries, how well your blood vessels and capillaries relax and contract and move blood efficiently through the body is reduced by half. Even among those younger healthy adults, who were who either used or either smoked or used edible cannabis. So that's, you know, those are pretty, pretty high numbers. And then I have another study that I wanted to share as well, around the heart. And so, in 2024, the journal for the American Heart Association study reported that more frequent cannabis use leads to higher heart and stroke risk, especially notable in younger adults. And why are younger adults more affected? It's because they tend to use cannabis more frequently and in higher doses, often via smoking or vaping. So these are methods associated with the strongest cardiovascular risk.

Wendy: Thank you, Martie, for joining us today.

Marti: Thank you, Gina and Wendy. Good to be here.



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Gina: Well, that's a wrap for this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

Wendy: And I'm Wendy. Listen to our next podcast.

Gina: And remember, the Benefit Detectives are here to help!