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# Odd puff of dope at 13 can lead to hard drugs

**JILL STARK**  
HEALTH

YOUNG teenagers who smoke cannabis even occasionally are at greater risk of abusing harder drugs and alcohol as adults, research shows.

A study that tracked almost 2000 Victorian schoolchildren for a decade found that those who had smoked cannabis occasionally when 13 and 14 were more likely to be taking ecstasy, cocaine or amphetamines at 24, than those who had abstained.

They were also more at risk of addiction to cannabis, with one in 10 occasional teenage users hooked on the herbal substance as adults, compared with only 1 per cent of those who had not smoked the drug as young adolescents.

Almost a third of the teenage occasional cannabis users were taking harder drugs in their early 20s compared with 11 per cent of those who had not earlier dabbled with the substance. And addiction to cigarettes was three times as common for occasional cannabis smokers than for abstainers, with 15 per cent hooked on nicotine by age 24.

The study, published last week in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, also revealed higher levels of alcoholism, with 15 per cent of

occasional cannabis smokers addicted to booze in early adulthood, compared with only 9 per cent of those who had abstained.

Although those who smoked cannabis regularly (weekly or more) had the highest levels of substance abuse in adulthood, it is significant that those who had dabbled only occasionally (less than weekly) were also at risk.

This finding contradicts previous research, which suggested regularly smoking the drug could lead to adult substance abuse but it was less harmful if used infrequently.

Lead author Professor Louisa Degenhardt, of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, said the new study highlighted the need for early intervention to prevent children taking up the habit.

"The reason why this is important is because most young people only ever engage in occasional cannabis use," Professor Degenhardt said. "What it definitely says is that early onset occasional cannabis use is a marker for being more likely to be engaging in a whole range of drug use behaviours in young adulthood."

Joe Tucci, chief executive of the Australian Childhood Foundation, urged parents not to allow their children to experiment with

cannabis.

"Parents need to realise that even occasional use of so-called recreational drugs is really the first step in a slippery slope. Patterns of behaviour start early in children, so these habits can be very hard to break," Dr Tucci said. "[Parents] need to monitor their children's behaviour and monitor whether they're using even so-called 'soft' drugs. Cannabis can cause lots of detrimental impacts all the way through to psychosis as you get older, so the perception of cannabis as a softer, harmless drug is not right."

Study participants were picked from Victorian private and public schools between 1992 and 1993 and were canvassed with computer and telephone surveys. They were followed up eight times over 10 years.

Professor Degenhardt called for caution in interpreting the study's results, saying it was unclear if cannabis was a "gateway" drug.

"Where you're talking about drugs that are not legal, if you're using one illegal drug you're probably going to have greater opportunity to use and know more people who are using other illicit drugs as well."

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<b>Cannabis use at ages 13-14</b>	<b>ALCOHOL ADDICTION</b>	<b>CANNABIS ADDICTION</b>	<b>OTHER DRUG USE</b>
No use	<b>9%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Occasional users	<b>15%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>28%</b>
Regular users	<b>23%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>60%</b>

SOURCE: BRITISH JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY



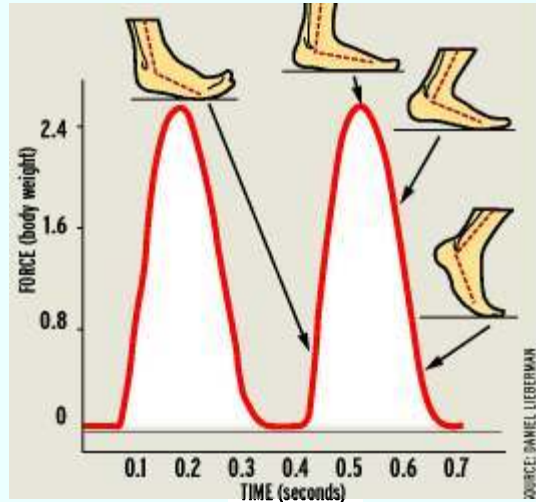
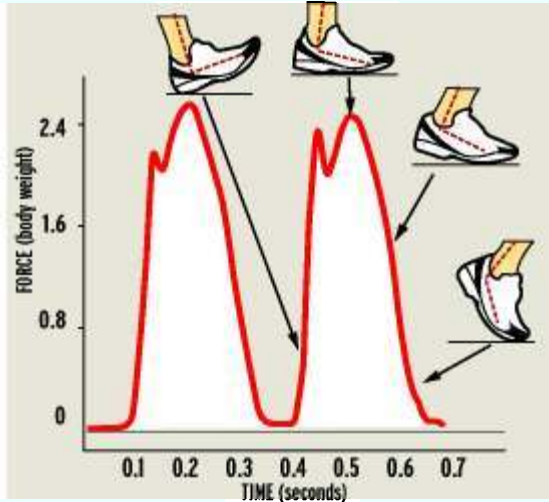


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## THE BARE FACTS

When people wear cushy shoes they are more likely to hit the ground heel first. There is a strong collision force, followed by a second peak as the runner steps through.

Barefoot runners are more likely to hit with their forefoot. They do not experience a jarring collision. The force peaks gradually.



SOURCE: DANIEL LIEBERMAN



## 'Barefoot' runners sock it to sport shoes

The growing trend for barely there footwear may be evolution at work, writes **Maris Beck**.