

## **Cannabis addicts get lung disease 20 years earlier**

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### **Heavy pot smokers will suffer serious lung disease two decades earlier than their cigarette-smoking counterparts, and the style of dope smoking is to blame.**

The deep, slow inhalation and long breath hold is predisposing cannabis smokers to a condition of rapid lung destruction much younger in life, a study by Melbourne researchers has found.

A team from the Department of Allergy, Immunology and Respiratory Medicine at Monash University reviewed the lung condition of middle-aged chronic cannabis smokers. They found high rates of bullous lung disease, a debilitating condition where air trapped in the lungs causes obstruction to breathing and eventual destruction of the organ. It is often caused by exposure to toxic chemicals or long-term exposure to tobacco smoke.

Studies have shown the disease will most likely strike tobacco smokers around the age of 65, but the new review, published in the journal *Respirology*, shows dope smokers are being hit 20 years earlier, while in their early 40s.

Lead author Dr Matthew Naughton said the disease could easily go undetected as patients suffering lung breakdown may show normal chest X-rays and lung functions.

"What is outstanding about this study is the relatively young ages of the lung disease patients, as well as the lack of abnormality on chest X-rays and lung functions in nearly half of the patients we tested," Dr Naughton said.

Marijuana smokers inhale more and hold their breath four times longer than cigarette smokers.

Dr Naughton said the breathing style increased the concentration and pulmonary deposition of inhaled particulate matter, causing greater and faster rapid lung destruction.

"Marijuana is inhaled as extremely hot fumes to the peak inspiration and held for as long as possible before slow exhalation," he said.

"This predisposes to greater damage to the lungs and makes marijuana smokers more prone to bullous disease as compared to cigarette smokers."

The researchers said the effects of marijuana smokers on the lung were rarely reported and poorly understood considering the popularity of the habit.

A recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report suggested 11 per cent of Australians smoke marijuana. Rates are much higher among teenagers, with almost one in five trying the substance