

sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

wildfact

Although sperm will only travel about 4 inches to reach an egg, that's the human equivalent of running a marathon. Minimum length of time to complete the journey: 2.5 seconds. What's your marathon time?

Q Does THC really lower sperm count?

A. If Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the primary active chemical in marijuana, makes smokers want to eat cheez-e puffs and watch 3D movies in slo-mo, what's its effect on sperm? As you suggest, recent research has shown an association between marijuana and the quantity and quality of sperm. You'll recall that each little swimmer has one job and one job only: to reach and fertilize an egg by travelling past the cervix, through the uterus, and into the fallopian tubes. To make this epic 4-inch journey, they need to move at just the right pace – with enough energy left over for a vigorous “kick” at the end of the race to improve the odds of fertilization.

A 2003 study by Dr. Lani Burkman found that among 22 regular marijuana users who smoked an average of 14 times per week, sperm were clearly affected. When compared to a control group who did not smoke cannabis, tokers averaged less seminal fluid and fewer total sperm. Researchers also found problems with sperm mobility among the smoker group: many of them swam too fast, too soon

and would likely burn out before ever reaching an egg.

Additionally, the lead researcher in the study suggested that females who smoke marijuana could also interfere with normal sperm mobility. Since THC can be detected in vaginal fluids and reproductive organs, sperm that enter the body of a female smoker may also be exposed to the cannabinoids found there.

The bottom line: marijuana **does** seem to affect sperm, and this, in turn, may lower the odds of fertilization. Keep in mind – that's not the same thing as saying marijuana renders men infertile or that THC, like the Mountain Dew reference from last week's myth-buster SexTalk column, is the male answer to contraception. If you smoke marijuana and don't want to make a baby right now, you'll still need a plan to help prevent pregnancy.



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