

Cannabis linked to early puberty and stunted growth

Smoking cannabis may cause early puberty and stunt growth in boys.

Researchers found that boys who smoked cannabis went through puberty earlier but grew more slowly.

They also found that rather than relaxing the boys, smoking cannabis made them more stressed, with levels of

the "stress hormone" cortisol significantly higher. The findings, by scientists in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, are being presented at the European Congress of Endocrinology in Dublin this week.

The researchers studied the levels of hormones involved in growth and puberty in the blood of 217 cannabis-

addicted boys and 220 non-smokers. Levels of puberty-related hormones such as testosterone and luteinising hormone were increased in the cannabis smokers but growth hormone levels in the group were decreased.

The cannabis smokers were on average 4kg lighter and 4½ inches shorter

than the non-smokers by the age of 20.

Dr Syed Shakeel Raza Rizvi said: "Marijuana use may provoke a stress response that stimulates onset of puberty but suppresses growth rate." He added that boys who went through puberty early were more likely to start drinking and smoking early.

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