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Researchers Suspect Link Between Synthetic Marijuana and Stroke

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redOrbit Staff & Wire Reports – Your Universe Online

Neurologists from the University of Southern Florida (USF) have discovered a link between smoking [synthetic marijuana](#) and [strokes](#) in otherwise healthy young adults.

Their findings, reported online in the journal [Neurology](#) Tuesday, feature case studies of two siblings who both experienced acute ischemic strokes shortly after smoking the substance known as spice. This type of stroke occurs when an artery to the brain becomes blocked.

Previous research has linked seizures, abnormal heart rhythms, heart attacks, psychosis, hallucinations and other serious adverse effects to the use of synthetic marijuana, which is also known as K2 and contains synthetic cannabinoid compounds, the university said. Experts have linked an increasing number of strokes to the use of actual marijuana, leading the USF team to explore whether or not spice could have a similar effect.

“Since the two patients were siblings, we wondered whether they might have any undiagnosed genetic conditions that predisposed them to strokes at a young age. We rigorously looked for those and didn't come up with anything,” senior author said Dr. [Scott Burgin](#), a USF professor and the director of the Comprehensive Stroke Center at Tampa General Hospital.

“To the best of our knowledge, what appeared to be heart-derived strokes occurred in two people with otherwise healthy hearts. So more study is needed,” he continued, adding that spice often contains chemicals that have not

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been tested or approved for human consumption. "You don't know what you're getting when you smoke synthetic marijuana... you may be playing dangerously with your brain and your health."

According to the university, synthetic marijuana is a term used to describe a mixture of herbs that have been doused with a solution of designer chemicals designed to produce a reaction similar to cannabis. However, according to Dr. Burgin, spice can actually be more potent than regular cannabis because the psychoactive ingredient it contains more completely binds to the cannabinoid receptors in the brain.

"Not identified in standard toxicology screens, spice has become the second only to natural marijuana as the most widely used illicit drug among high school seniors, according to a 2011 survey sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse," the university said. "In Florida, it is a third-degree felony to sell, manufacture, deliver or possess with the intent sell these synthetic drugs, so they are more difficult to buy... but [are] still readily available online."

Dr. Burgin said that doctors and medical professionals need to be more cognizant of the potentially toxic effects of spice and other synthetic recreational drugs, particularly when it comes to strokes, [heart attacks](#) or other conditions not typically observed in younger patients. He advises physicians to ask about cannabis and spice use, as patients rarely volunteer such information and the substances do not typically show up during routine drug tests.

Source: redOrbit Staff & Wire Reports - Your Universe Online

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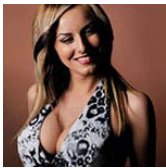
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