

Medical Cannabis is Medicine



Since 1996, 46 states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam have passed laws which grant patients the right to use cannabis or cannabis-based products as a treatment option under the care of their physician.

Medical cannabis has been shown to be effective in the treatment of:

- Chronic pain
- Seizure disorders
- Muscle spasms caused by multiple sclerosis
- Poor appetite and weight loss caused by chronic illness, such as HIV/AIDS, or nerve pain
- Nausea from cancer chemotherapy
- Gastrointestinal disorders such as Crohn's disease
- Anxiety
- Nausea
- Inflammation

How Medical Cannabis Works In the Body

There are hundreds of chemical compounds in the cannabis plant that work together to provide relief to an array of symptoms. These compounds work by imitating compounds our bodies already produce called endocannabinoids. All humans have an endocannabinoid system, the balance of which works to ensure internal stability and health. Cannabinoids help negotiate the communication between cells. When there is a problem with our endocannabinoid system, unpleasant symptoms and complications can occur.

When you consume cannabis, cannabinoids bind to receptors in the nervous system in both the brain (CB-1 receptors) and the body (CB-2 receptors). Different cannabinoids have different effects depending on which receptors they bind to. For example, THC binds to receptors in the brain, while CBN (cannabinol) will typically bind to receptors in the body.

Cannabinoids

Depending on strain, concentration, and other factors, cannabis can have diverse cannabinoid profiles. These differences in cannabinoid makeup can lead to several different types of relief. Cannabis contains over 100 different cannabinoids, many of which have documented medical value.

- Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (**THC**) is the most studied cannabinoid. Among its many therapeutic uses, THC is used to treat tumors, inflammation, pain, spasms, nausea, anxiety and can affect perception, mood, or behavior.
- Cannabidiol (**CBD**) is used to treat convulsions, inflammation, anxiety, and nausea. It has many of the same therapeutic qualities as THC but without THC's distinct mood effects. Some strains of cannabis are specifically grown to be rich in CBD.
- Cannabinol (**CBN**) when administered alone has no reported effect in humans. It may increase the effects of THC related to mood, decreasing pressure within the eye, and seizures.
- Cannabichromene (**CBC**) promotes the pain relief effects of THC and has calming effects.

- Cannabigerol (**CBG**) has calming effects and antimicrobial properties. It can also lower the pressure within the eye.
- Tetrahydrocannabivarin (**THCV**) is showing promise for type 2 diabetes and related metabolic disorders.

Products and strains are continually being produced and grown that deliver varying doses of cannabinoids. Knowing which types best treat which symptoms is a handy piece of knowledge to bring to a medical cannabis dispensary or to provide to a patient.

Methods of Administration

Medical cannabis can be:

- Smoked
- Vaporized (heated until release of the active ingredients, but with no smoke)
- Eaten (usually in the form of cookies or candy)
- Taken as a liquid extract

Ensuring Safe and Legal Access

Ensuring safe and legal access to cannabis means:

- International, federal and state laws and regulations recognize cannabis as a legal medicine.
- Medical professionals are able to recommend medical cannabis as a frontline treatment option when appropriate.
- Patients and their caregivers have the information they need to make educated decisions.
- Patients and medical professionals can create personalized treatment by incorporating a diversity of products and delivery methods.
- Patients can trust labels on products, and trust that medicines are free of pesticides and contaminants.
- Health insurance covers medical cannabis.

References

Americans for Safe Access. (2016). A Patient's Guide to Medical Cannabis [Pamphlet]. Washington, DC: Americans for Safe Access.

Rahn, B. (2017, March 20). Cannabinoids 101: What Makes Cannabis Medicine? Retrieved August 24, 2017, from <https://www.leafly.com/news/cannabis-101/cannabinoids-101-what-makes-cannabis-medicine>