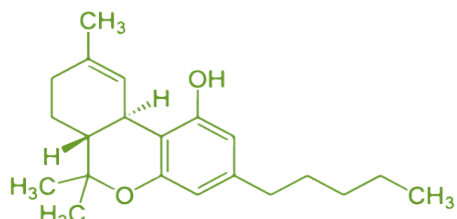


WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH MARIJUANA? SPECIAL EDITION



An Overview of Marijuana for Medical Use

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ADVERTISEMENT MANAGER

Marijuana, also known as cannabis, is a commonly known mind-altering drug whose effects give the user a sense of euphoric "high." While research of marijuana is still a fairly new field of study, there have been many proven pros and cons of consuming it.

The typical ways of consuming marijuana are by either smoking, ingesting or through topicals. Each of these categories have several subcategories, but all involve introducing the substance into the body's systems.

After consuming marijuana, its main chemical tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) races through the bloodstream and reaches the brain within seconds of smoking. Many users typically describe the effects of marijuana as initially relaxing and mellow. The user may experience eye dilation, colors to be more vibrant and other senses to be heightened. However, what many don't know is exactly how the drug affects the brain's chemistry.

Neurons are the cells that process information in the brain. Chemicals called neurotransmitters allow neurons to communicate with each other. Dr. Kris Biondolillo, professor of psychology at Arkansas State University, describes the effects of marijuana as having a direct influence on the brain's major neurotransmitter systems.

"There are receptors in the brain that love a molecule that one gets when self-administering marijuana," Biondolillo said.

Foreign chemicals, such as THC, can mimic or block actions of neurotransmitters and interfere with the brain's normal functions. The drug is proven to interact heavily with the major neurochemicals such as dopamine and norepinephrine.

"Just that little bit of knowledge tells us that introducing marijuana into the system is going to have a potentially big impact on a lot of functions," Biondolillo explained.

Marijuana can have some long-lasting effects on the brain, especially in those still developing. Brains in babies, children and teenagers are especially susceptible to the effects of THC.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) describes the effect on developing brains as, "Using marijuana before age 18 may affect how the brain builds connections for functions like attention, memory and learning. Marijuana's effects on attention, memory and learning may last a long time or even be permanent, but more research is needed to fully understand these effects."

The frontal lobe of the brain is responsible for higher cognitive functions such as memory, emotions, impulse control, problem solving, social interaction and motor function. This lobe is not fully developed until around the age of 25. Therefore, it has been shown that users of marijuana may have different frontal lobe development than nonusers, especially persistent users.

"The picture is relatively clear that the active ingredient in marijuana (THC) does not



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Dr. Kris Biondolillo



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Arkansas legalized the use for medical marijuana in 2016. The first medicinal dispensary officially opened in 2019

improve our decision making," Biondolillo said. "It does not make us more logical or more likely to make a decision while weighing long term outcomes."

Biondolillo continued to explain that when a person's pre-frontal lobe is not fully developed yet and a foreign substance like marijuana is introduced, it will simply "fuzz" things up. Users may be less likely to think about more logical and pragmatic decisions with long term outcomes and rather focus on the happenings of right now.

While marijuana does alter brain chemistry and can have lasting effects, it has also been proven to have many pros of using it.

Marijuana can be used to control chronic pain in place of opiates. Thousands of individuals throughout the United States are addicted to opiates, with their addiction becoming out of control. One major reason for this being the control of chronic pain.

Chronic pain is described as pain that is ongoing and

usually lasts longer than six months. Many have now turned to medical marijuana as an alternative to control their chronic pain and an alternative to opiates.

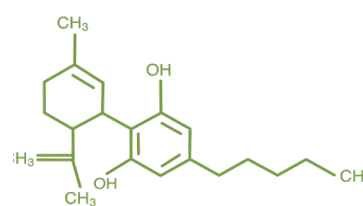
Medical marijuana is legal in 37 states, with nearly 3.1 million medical marijuana patients registered, according to the Marijuana Policy Project. Some studies have shown a link between marijuana and pain relief. The Pew Research Center estimates that over 93% of Colorado's more than 87,000 medical marijuana patients suffer from severe pain.

An article by the Pew Research Center states, "Many of the about 40 randomized controlled trials that have tested whether cannabis and its chemical compounds, called cannabinoids, reduce chronic pain have found that they work as a pain reliever," said Ziva Cooper, research director of the University of California, Los Angeles Cannabis Research Initiative. While this may be true, many medical experts say more research is needed to prove whether marijuana is a

controller of pain and whether it sizes up to opiates or not.

Another use for marijuana is for cancer patients. While it cannot cure cancer, it can help to control a patient's symptoms often associated with chemotherapy, such as vomiting and nausea. The CDC reported that, "studies of the chemicals found in the marijuana plant suggest that certain cannabinoids can be helpful in treating nausea and vomiting from cancer chemotherapy, as well as in treating neuropathic pain (pain caused by damaged nerves)."

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NEWS, 3A



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- An in-depth look at Arkansas recreational marijuana ballot petitions
- Campus crime

NEWS, 4A

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SPORTS, 1B



- Changing attitudes towards Marijuana
- Athletes who have been penalized
- Famous Athletes endorsing CBD products

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