



Can marijuana really help people with epilepsy?

It is difficult to find unbiased answers to questions about the medical use and potential of marijuana. Marijuana has some well-documented beneficial effects to ease the suffering of various illnesses, but there is little research on the effects of marijuana in people with epilepsy. Self-reported effects vary from person to person – some find it helps their seizures and some find it worsens them.

For around 5,000 years marijuana has been thought to have medicinal properties. In Australia, tincture of cannabis was used in medicine until the 1960s, until it was declared a prohibited drug.

Marijuana is also called grass, weed, cannabis or pot. Hash and skunk are stronger forms. The active component of marijuana is Tetra Hydra Cannabinol (THC). THC is readily absorbed in the brain and is mind-altering. It can be detected in the body for weeks after use.

Cannabis has been used to treat conditions such as:

- ◆ Nausea and loss of appetite caused by the treatment for cancer and AIDS
- ◆ Chronic pain
- ◆ Glaucoma, for reducing pressure within the eye
- ◆ Huntington's chorea
- ◆ Parkinsonian tremor

Immediate effects of marijuana include:

- ◆ A relaxed or 'high' feeling
- ◆ Dizziness, sleepiness
- ◆ Bloodshot eyes
- ◆ Feeling very thirsty or hungry
- ◆ Anxiety or paranoia
- ◆ Loss of inhibition

Effects vary depending on the strength of the marijuana and whether substances such as alcohol and other drugs have also been used.

Short-term effects of regular use include:

- ◆ Problems with memory and learning
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating and problem-solving
- ◆ Loss of interest in other activities
- ◆ Poor coordination
- ◆ Poor judgment
- ◆ Increased heart rate
- ◆ Poor motivation

Possible long-term use of marijuana include:

- ◆ Similar problems to smokers e.g. chest problems such as coughing, wheezing, chest infections and asthma
- ◆ THC can damage cells and tissues that help protect against disease
- ◆ Memory and learning problems
- ◆ Paranoia
- ◆ Confusion
- ◆ Hallucinations
- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Psychosis
- ◆ Balance and coordination difficulties
- ◆ Cancer of the mouth, throat and lungs

These effects can seriously impact schooling, employment, sports, driving, health and relationships.

Is it a useful antiepileptic medication?

Research into the effects of marijuana on seizure activity is inconclusive. Some animal models and some uncontrolled clinical human studies do suggest that marijuana has antiepileptic effects in humans but this may be specific to certain seizure types. Overall, there is insufficient clinical data to conclude if recreational or regular use of marijuana has any influence on seizures. As the data remains limited, and in some cases conflicting, caution is needed if using cannabis and cannabinoids to control seizures.

Marijuana use in Australia is not legal and therefore not recommended for use as an antiepileptic agent.

Can marijuana increase seizures?

Some studies and anecdotal reports show that high doses of THC can trigger seizures. Marijuana can temporarily impair short-term memory and like alcohol, it may increase the chance of missing antiepileptic medications. Marijuana use or withdrawal could potentially trigger seizures in some people.

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This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.