

Study: Medical Marijuana May Cure Crohn's Disease

Does Medical Marijuana Cure Crohn's Disease? Study Finds Some Patients Had Increased Appetite, Sleep Function, No Side Effects

By Thomas Barrabi

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A new study suggests that the regular use of medical marijuana may achieve the "complete remission" of Crohn's disease, an inflammatory bowel disorder.

The study, published in *Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology*, attempted to determine the effect that regular medical marijuana use had on patients with Crohn's disease, *Medical Daily* reports. An examination of 21 subjects revealed that medical marijuana effectively treated symptoms in many patients, while achieving "complete remission" in others.

"The marijuana plant *Cannabis sativa* has been reported to produce beneficial effects for patients with inflammatory bowel diseases, but this has not been investigated in controlled trials," researchers at Meir Medical Center in Israel stated. "We performed a prospective trial to determine whether cannabis can induce remission in patients with Crohn's disease."

During the study, 11 subjects were given two "joints" of medical marijuana each day for two months, while the remaining 10 subjects constituted a placebo group. Of the 11 Crohn's disease patients who used medical marijuana, five experienced total remission of their symptoms, increased appetite, and improved sleep patterns, *Medical Daily* reports. Furthermore, 10 of the 11 patients experienced some form of "clinical response" to the medical marijuana usage.

Ultimately, the study determined that "THC-rich cannabis produced significant clinical, steroid-free benefits to 11 patients with active Crohn's disease, compared with placebo, without side effects," *Medical Daily* reports. However, researchers noted that "primary end point of the study (induction of remission) was not achieved," despite the five patients who experienced that effect. Crohn's disease has no cure, but is often treated with dietary changes, corticosteroids, or, in extreme cases, invasive surgery.

Although it is often identified as an autoimmune disorder, Crohn's

disease is actually an immune deficiency state arising from various environmental and genetic factors, Medical Daily reports. The chronic inflammatory illness attacks the subject's gastrointestinal tract, resulting in symptoms of "mild abdominal pain to more severe cases of bloody diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, weight loss and fevers."

According to Medical Daily, patients with severe instances of Crohn's disease can defecate as many as 20 times a day. Although the illness affects 400,000 to 600,000 people in North America, many people aren't diagnosed until years after the disease manifests.

1. Clin Gastroenterol Hepatol. 2013 May 4. pii: S1542-3565(13)00604-6. doi: 10.1016/j.cgh.2013.04.034. [Epub ahead of print]

Cannabis Induces a Clinical Response in Patients With Crohn's Disease: A Prospective Placebo-Controlled Study.

Naftali T, Lihi BL, Iris D, Ephraim Philip L, Benjaminov Fabiana S, Fred Meir K.

Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Meir Medical Center and Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel Aviv University, Kfar Saba, Israel. Electronic address: naftali@post.tau.ac.il.

BACKGROUND & AIMS: The marijuana plant *Cannabis sativa* has been reported to produce beneficial effects for patients with inflammatory bowel diseases, but this has not been investigated in controlled trials. We performed a prospective trial to determine whether cannabis can induce remission in patients with Crohn's disease.

METHODS: We studied 21 patients (mean age, 40 ± 14 y; 13 men) with Crohn's Disease Activity Index (CDAI) scores greater than 200 who did not respond to therapy with steroids, immunomodulators, or anti-tumor necrosis factor- α agents.

Patients were assigned randomly to groups given cannabis, twice daily, in the form of cigarettes containing 11.5 mg of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) or placebo containing cannabis flowers from which the THC had been extracted. Disease activity and laboratory tests were assessed during 8 weeks of treatment and 2 weeks thereafter.

RESULTS: Complete remission (CDAI score, <150) was achieved by 5 of 11 subjects in the cannabis group (45%) and 1 of 10 in the placebo group

(10%; $P = .43$). A

clinical response (decrease in CDAI score of >100) was observed in 10 of 11 subjects in the cannabis group (90%; from 330 ± 105 to 152 ± 109) and 4 of 10 in the placebo group (40%; from 373 ± 94 to 306 ± 143 ; $P = .028$). Three patients in the cannabis group were weaned from steroid dependency. Subjects receiving cannabis reported improved appetite and sleep, with no significant side effects.

CONCLUSIONS: Although the primary end point of the study (induction of remission) was not achieved, a short course (8 weeks) of THC-rich cannabis produced significant clinical, steroid-free benefits to 11 patients with active Crohn's disease, compared with placebo, without side effects. Further studies, with larger patient groups and a nonsmoking mode of intake, are warranted. [ClinicalTrials.govNCT01040910](https://clinicaltrials.gov/NCT01040910).

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