



MEDICINAL CANNABIS: SAFE AND EFFECTIVE

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WHAT IS CANNABIS?

Cannabis is a plant (*C. sativa* or *C. indica*) which has been successfully used as a medicine by countless patients over millennia. It can be inhaled as a vapor, smoked, or eaten.

WHY IS CANNABIS AN EFFECTIVE MEDICINE?

Most body tissues contain “receptors” for chemicals called “cannabinoids.” The body makes its own cannabinoids, using them to regulate numerous aspects of bodily function. Cannabis plants contain 60 or so different cannabinoids.

WHAT ILLNESSES CAN BE HELPED BY CANNABIS?

Cannabis has been found useful in a variety of conditions – arthritis, chronic pain, cancer treatment, Multiple Sclerosis, muscle spasms, bladder control, nausea, appetite stimulation, seizure disorders, and many others.

AREN'T THERE ALREADY OTHER DRUGS TO TREAT SUCH CONDITIONS?

There are often many drugs available, but they don't always work well, or they cause unacceptable side-effects. Drug companies are constantly searching for additional medication options to market for long-established conditions; this is because what we have now is often unsatisfactory for some, or many, sufferers.

ISN'T CANNABIS DANGEROUS?

Cannabis is remarkably safe – in fact, there is no known lethal dose. You can't die from consuming too much cannabis. The primary physical side-effect is the “high” that many people experience, though some people note dry mouth, reduced blood pressure, a more rapid pulse, and a few new users have become apprehensive until their first dose wears off. Anyone under the acute influence of cannabis should not drive; the same is true for many current drugs, which come with warning labels right on the bottles.

DOES CANNABIS CAUSE LUNG CANCER?

Studies show that although cannabis smoke does contain (theoretically) cancer-causing chemicals, in practice even heavy cannabis smokers are no more likely to get lung cancer than non-users. In fact, cannabis appears to reduce the risk of head and neck cancers. Some cannabinoids even seem to inhibit tumor cell growth.

ISN'T CANNABIS ADDICTIVE?

Cannabis addiction is real, but occurs relatively infrequently, and withdrawal is mild. By contrast, many currently-available medications are highly addictive, withdrawal can be severe and dangerous, and overdoses can be fatal. Both tobacco and alcohol are far more addictive, as well as destructive to body tissues.

WON'T SOME PEOPLE FAKE ILLNESS TO OBTAIN PRESCRIPTION CANNABIS?

Yes. They already do this commonly to obtain legal medications like morphine, codeine, oxycodone, barbiturates, Valium, Ritalin, and methamphetamine. (Yes, meth is a legal drug!) Prescribing doctors must be vigilant. But a small number of abusers must not be allowed to dictate how legitimate patients are treated. The con artists don't get to call the shots!

IS THERE ANY REAL EVIDENCE THAT MEDICINAL CANNABIS WORKS, OR ARE WE ONLY RELYING ON STORIES TOLD BY DRUG ABUSERS?

Although the political climate in the US has long prevented serious research on medicinal cannabis, valid studies have been conducted in other countries. They consistently show that cannabis is both effective and safe. Five recent studies conducted in California, for example, performed in accordance with strict FDA guidelines, showed inhaled cannabis safe and effective for pain control and for muscle spasms associated with MS.

MOST MEDICINES HAVE KNOWN DOSAGES, AND THEIR CONTENT IS THE SAME FROM ONE BATCH TO ANOTHER. HOW CAN YOU KNOW WHAT'S REALLY IN ANY GIVEN SAMPLE OF CANNABIS?

Cannabis strains vary from one to another as much as dog breeds do. (Think Chihuahuas and St. Bernards!) Cannabinoids vary in proportion and amount. However, when a given strain is regulated and medically legal, growing conditions can be kept constant, and the plant can easily be "cloned" (grown from cuttings) so that the composition remains stable. Due to less formal research, we have a good idea as to which strains are most effective for specific illnesses or symptoms.

Cannabis is used like an artificial sweetener. There is no "standard dose" of Sweet 'n' Low – a person just uses the amount that works best for her. Cannabis patients rapidly become very adept at taking just the right amount for relief of their symptoms, even when starting a new strain. They don't need a package insert.

DON'T MEDICINAL CANNABIS LAWS BYPASS THE FDA? AREN'T THEY JUST UNCONTROLLED EXPERIMENTATION ON THE PUBLIC?

A truly uncontrolled experiment with wide-scale cannabis use, not subject to the sorts of regulation and medical oversight medical laws require, has been going on since at least the 1950's. We now have a great deal of data on cannabis' potentials and liabilities.

The current ban on cannabis, resulting from its status as a "Schedule I drug," was not based on FDA-approved research either. The FDA makes it very hard for anyone to study this medication, since it has already "officially" been designated illegal.

Quality studies have in fact been conducted in other countries, and are emerging in the US as well. These confirm the utility of cannabis as medication, as well as its safety relative to many other drugs currently available with prescription.

Today the shelves of pharmacies and health food stores are stocked with a multitude of drugs – it's misleading to call them anything else – which have not been studied or approved by the FDA to determine either their safety or effectiveness. By calling them "dietary supplements," or "nutraceuticals," manufacturers can market these drugs using carefully-worded promotions that are clearly intended to convey the impression that they act like medicines, despite disclaimers to the contrary.

MEDICINAL CANNABIS SHOULD BE AN OPTION FOR PATIENTS WHOSE SUFFERING CANNOT BE ALLEVIATED BY OTHER METHODS.

PEOPLE WHO DO OBTAIN UNIQUE RELIEF FROM CANNABIS SHOULD NOT BE LABELED AS "CRIMINALS."

WITH PROPER REGULATION, CANNABIS CAN BE PRODUCED ACCORDING TO QUALITY STANDARDS, AND PROVIDED TO PATIENTS FOR SAFE THERAPY. IT CAN EVEN OFFER A SOURCE OF TAX REVENUE.