

## **The Benefits of Medical Marijuana for Cancer Patients**

Due to being illegal or quasi-legal in many countries, you might not find as much information on the uses of medical marijuana (or marihuana) as you might expect. However, many studies have been conducted, and are still being conducted, about the medical uses of cannabis. Despite a somewhat blind governmental view in many countries, including Canada and the United States, these studies have shown repeatedly exactly how medical marijuana can help those suffering from severe illnesses such as cancer.

### **Traditional Cancer Treatments**

Lung cancer, prostate cancer, breast cancer - in fact, most types of cancer all start the same basic way. Something causes cancer cells to divide and grow without pause, spreading badly damaged DNA. Those cells invade other tissues and, in most cases, form tumors.

Cancer studies have taken leaps and bounds as far as finding treatments to slow, and sometimes stop, the spread of cancer. However, two of the most important treatments, chemotherapy and radiation therapy, also cause damage and, often, severe side effects.

For instance, some of the most powerful, toxic chemicals are used in chemotherapeutic agents. Both treatments kill cancer cells, but healthy cells as well. Chemotherapeutic agents such as Adriamycin (doxorubicin) and Platinol (cisplatin) can, and have, caused immune suppression and multiple organ damage, but they also cause severe nausea and vomiting.

The vomiting can last over a period of days, to the point that some patients have actually torn their esophagus. Due to the vomiting and lack of appetite, severe dehydration and weight loss is normal. In fact, many cancer patients begin having a reaction before chemotherapy begins, in "anticipation" of the side effects. Unfortunately, although chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy may be an integral part of their survival, many cancer patients decide not to take the therapies because the side effects are so severe.

Because of this, many are given a mix of anti-nausea drugs. Often, the anti-nausea drugs work. However, the drugs only give partial symptom control, while for others they give no control at all. In addition, those who take traditional medications may also suffer fever, bone pain, fatigue, anxiety, sleep problems and changes in heart activity, among other issues. This leaves cancer patients to suffer from

the effects of the cancer itself, the side effects of the treatments, and the side effects of medications used to alleviate the initial side effects of the treatments.

### **Medical Marijuana for Cancer Patients**

It has proven in many studies, performed by prestigious scientific and medical organizations and individuals, that medical marijuana can (and does) relieve pain and nausea. In fact, some of these studies go as far back as the 1970s and older.

For instance, in 1975, the New England Journal of Medicine published the results of a "double-blind" study on the effects of oral (ingested rather than smoked) tetrahydrocannabinol on nausea and vomiting. According to the study, "No patient vomited while experiencing a subjective "high". Oral tetrahydrocannabinol has antiemetic properties and is significantly better than a placebo in reducing vomiting caused by chemotherapeutic agents."

A 1999 report by the Institutes of Medicine concluded, "In patients already experiencing severe nausea or vomiting, pills are generally ineffective, because of the difficulty in swallowing or keeping a pill down, and slow onset of the drug effect. Thus an inhalation (but, preferably not smoking) cannabinoid drug delivery system would be advantageous for treating chemotherapy-induced nausea."

Although freedom from nausea and vomiting are two of the most noticed benefits of medical marijuana use, many have reported a reduction in the severity of wasting away. As well, they've notice a lessening in depression and other "side effects" brought on by the disease, including an increase in appetite. All of these things together have helped many cancer patients live a better, happier, more comfortable life. However, studies have also shown a shocking benefit.

Over twenty major studies in the past nine years have shown that cannabinoids (the chemicals in cannabis) actually *fight* cancer cells. In fact, it's been shown that cannabinoids arrest cancer growths of many different forms of cancer, including brain, melanoma and breast cancer. There's even growing evidence that cannabinoids cause direct anti-tumor activity.

Since the possibility was first realized, many more studies have been conducted, focused on the possibility of cannabinoids have anticarcinogenic effects. A 2007 study by the Institute of Toxicology and Pharmacology in Rostock, Germany focused on human cervical

cancer (HeLa) cells. The cells were treated with specific cannaboids and THC. Even at low concentrations, MA and THC "led to a decrease in invasion of 61.5% and 68.1% respectively."

The benefits of medical marijuana for cancer patients are clear when it comes to increased appetite, reduction of pain, wasting, vomiting and nausea, as well as depression. Although its anticarcinogenic effects aren't quite as clear, ongoing research further points to the possibility that medical marijuana may actually be what many claim it is – a truly miraculous drug.

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<http://jnci.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/djm268v1> (2007 study)