Benefits and Considerations of Using CBD to Treat Chronic Pain

by ALISON RICHARDS

CBD for Pain

Cannabis has been used worldwide for thousands of years, both recreationally and medically. While cannabis is still classed as an illegal drug in many countries and states across the world, cannabidiol (CBD) and cannabis-infused products are legal and widely available online and in-store. Due to this, CBD for pain has become a helpful coping mechanism.

CBD vs THC

First, let's clarify the difference between cannabis and cannabidiol (CBD). CBD and THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) are both components of the cannabis plant. THC is the component of the plant for causing euphoria or getting you high. Cannabis, or marijuana as it is also known, is generally smoked, inhaled or vaped, and in many places is illegal and deemed a controlled substance. marijuana contains THC.

CBD infused products contain very low levels of THC. They will generally be under 0.3% or even 0.2%. In many cases they will have no THC. They will never get you high and are classed as a food supplement.

Why Are Cannabis and CBD Infused Products Becoming Popular to Treat Pain?

Cannabis and CBD infused products have risen in popularity in recent years as a pain reliever, possibly due to relaxed legality, easy availability and almost certainly due to the speed at which people are sharing their positive experiences.

The medical profession traditionally favored anti-depressants, cognitive behavioral therapy, physical therapy and acupuncture as forms of pain relief. The recent "opioid crisis" (reporting of over-prescribing, addiction, long term safety and even death) has no doubt had many chronic pain sufferers looking for alternative methods to relieve their pain

With the safety concerns over opioids, non-opioid medications being ineffective at treating pain, and no imminent breakthroughs in the pipeline to produce an effective, safe, non-addictive pain killer, could cannabis be the answer?

Is It Safe to Take Cannabis and CBD for Pain?

Unfortunately, as is the case for opioid medications, there has not been enough research into the safety and long term side effects for using cannabis and CBD to combat pain. It is reported that of all the people who use cannabis, a whopping 64% of them use it for pain relief.

Researchers at McGill University in Canada recently discovered that patients who used cannabis with a 9.8% level of THC found far greater pain relief than those who took cannabis with lower or zero levels of THC.

However, this study was conducted with only 23 participants, so much more research is needed to see if that is the case across a wider population.

A different study showed that patients with opioid addiction were able to wean themselves off injectable opioids by inhaling cannabis. Another showed promising results in easing nerve pain such as fibromyalgia.

Of course, longer term studies have proven that recreational use of cannabis, which is usually smoked, can cause lung damage, addiction and mental health problems. The legality of using should also be taken into account.

There has been no research at present that would suggest using CBD products pose the same threat, as they contain very little THC.

Types of CBD Products

CBD products are available in many forms. Many people use it as an oil taken orally by placing a couple of drops under the tongue and holding it for 60 to 90 seconds to allow it to enter their body. Some take it as a tablet, capsule or even as a gummy bear. It also comes in topical oils, gels and creams that can be rubbed into the affected area that gives pain.

In the U.K., oral CBD products are labelled and sold as a food supplement. However, like other countries, these products have no regulation over the contents or the labelling.

What Can Cannabis and CBD Treat?

Cannabis and CBD infused products have been used to treat various types of chronic pain: nerve pain, fibromyalgia, arthritis, menstruation pain and migraines, among others.

Many people use them as a sleep aid, to combat anxiety, cure or relieve skin conditions and even to treat cancer. However, there have not been enough scientific studies and surveys to determine safety and efficacy in any of these areas.

Is Cannabis or CBD Effective at Controlling Pain?

Pain is personal and hard to gauge on a universal level. Often, medical professionals will ask what your level of pain is between 1 and 10, but one person’s level 5 may be another’s level 10! It is not an effective way to measure pain. Similarly, one person can manage pain with a low-level drug, while others may find something much stronger still to be ineffective. We all have different levels of coping with pain.

I have read much about the positive effects of using CBD to manage pain, both from personal friends, online and in the press. I myself have been suffering with chronic pain for two years now, and am still trying to find an effective way of managing my pain levels, both through medical and alternative channels.

I tried an oral CDB oil with 15% cannabinoids that had no effect on my pain levels or the anxiety caused by them. However, I have tried heat and cooling gels that were infused with CBD and found them to provide effective short-term pain relief.

I have a friend who has experienced success using a 40% CBD oil to manage period pain where mainstream drugs were of no help to her. Another friend found relief using CBD capsules and gummy bears both for pain, anxiety and ADHD, and another who also uses it herself and for her dogs!

Keep in Mind

There is no doubt that more and more patients, and medical professionals are taking an interest in the effectiveness and safety of these products, which will result in more widespread studies.

To this end, I would advise anyone thinking of taking cannabis or CBD to relieve pain to:

- Always seek medical advice first.
- Check out the legalities in your place of residence if considering cannabis.
- Research the percentage of cannabinoids best suited for your ailment in CBD products.
- Find a distributor who is knowledgeable, trustworthy and happy to give you advice on their range of CBD products.