Does Marijuana Use Help Depression?

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Marijuana and Depression

Marijuana is a hot-button issue right now. It is highly debated – is it good for treating certain conditions? Should it be nationally legalized?

One thing is for certain – it is not going away any time soon. For that reason, it is a good idea to evaluate whether it can be utilized to treat disease or treat symptoms related to disease.

>Can marijuana be helpful for the treatment of depression?

Does Marijuana Use Cause Depression?

Mayo Clinic researchers suggest that people who smoke marijuana are more likely to be diagnosed with depression than nonsmokers. However, their research does not indicate that the marijuana smoking actually *causes* depression.

According to the research, “It's likely that the genetic, environmental, or other factors that trigger depression also lead to marijuana use.” In addition, people who are depressed may use marijuana to cope with their symptoms.

There is also research that may suggest that heavy use of marijuana can trigger schizophrenia and psychosis.

Does Marijuana Help Depression?

In a 2015 study performed by the University of Buffalo’s Research Institute on Addictions found that marijuana may be helpful in the treatment of depression.

The study found that endocannabinoids can reduce depression related to chronic stress. Endocannabinoids are chemicals in our brains that work on the same receptors that THC, the active compound in marijuana, does.

What does this mean? It may mean that the use of marijuana can be used to treat depression, along with a host of other mental illnesses.

For example, a 2014 study found that people who have diagnosed PTSD who also smoked marijuana had a 75 percent reduction in symptoms.

Another study in *Neuropsychopharmacology* noted that the use of synthetic cannabinoids may change the brains of rats with traumatic memories, which may actually prevent behavioral and psychological symptoms of PTSD from occurring.

However, there may be a fine line. Research shows that heavy use of marijuana can actually *worsen* depression

symptoms. More research needs to be done to establish the “right” amount of marijuana for the treatment of depression.

Conflicting Evidence

Despite the evidence presented above, *Harvard Health* reported conflicting evidence. An Australian study interviewed over 1,500 teenagers, aged 14 and 15, then interviewed them seven years later. It was found that 60 percent of participants had used marijuana before the age of 20. It was also found that half of the women who were weekly users of marijuana as teenagers were twice as likely to suffer from depression as those who were not marijuana users.

Additionally, a study in Baltimore performed in the 1980s and 1990s assessed marijuana abuse and symptoms of depression. At the conclusion of the study, they found "people for whom the drug caused social problems, such as inability to perform at work. The results showed people who initially did not have depressive symptoms but abused marijuana were more than four times as likely to have depressive symptoms at the follow-up date than those who did not abuse marijuana. The depressive symptoms associated with earlier marijuana abuse included suicidal thoughts and a feeling of boredom."

The Bottom Line…

The evidence regarding the use of marijuana for the treatment of depression is conflicting at best. When deciding to use marijuana for your depression symptoms, consult your physician. If you decide it is in your best interest, keep in mind that each state has their own laws regarding marijuana use.