



Time to Join the Cannabis Club?

CBD and THC are touted as miracle cures. Here's how to decide whether cannabis is right for you.

BY ANNA MARRIAN

EVERYONE SEEMS TO BE talking about it. Your cousin added it to her coffee and suddenly perked up. A girlfriend says she's been able to coax her partner back to the bedroom. All this buzz is about CBD (cannabidiol), which has gained popularity as a lifestyle supplement. Proponents tout benefits such as wakefulness, antianxiety, anti-insomnia, pain relief, and female arousal, depending on the dose. Is its rising popularity due to slick marketing, or is there experience and science behind it?

CBD is the nonpsychoactive component of the hemp plant, a cousin of marijuana, but it works without the high—a plus for the working woman.

TO YOUR HEALTH

CBD is grown to contain less than 0.3 percent THC (tetrahydrocannabinol, the compound that makes you high). It's an agricultural product, not a controlled substance like marijuana, and is legal to consume in all 50 states. (It was federally decriminalized in 2018.) Over the past two years, 64 million Americans have tried CBD, according to a 2019 *Consumer Reports* survey. Most said it was beneficial, particularly for anxiety.

Medical marijuana is farmed to produce high THC and is generally known for reducing pain, nausea, and inflammation, according to the American Cancer Society. While CBD alone may have stolen the limelight, consumers have discovered that CBD and THC may actually work better together; CBD can ameliorate the occasional anxiety and

paranoia associated with THC, according to the *Journal of Psychopharmacology* and maybe soften a THC high. In fact, cannabis dispensary Med Men in New York City says the combination products are its best-sellers, even in a state where THC requires a medical marijuana prescription card. Med Men offers state-by-state guidance for prescription cards.

Marijuana is now legal for recreational use in eleven states—Alaska, California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington, and the District of Columbia. In those places, no prescription card is necessary, and dispensaries will typically sell multiple brands in many forms, including flower, edibles, vapes, and tinctures, as well as CBD.

Consumers have found various approaches to get the desired results. In general, CBD was found to reduce anxiety and inflammation while the combinations or THC alone may be more effective for sleep and pain.

CBD & CBD/THC COMBINATION

CBD is commonly taken as soft gels or capsules, sublingually as a tincture, as edibles, or as vapes. Vapes, however, have been shown to cause lung injury, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

For inflammation pain—often arthritis—CBD balms, creams, or oils can be applied to the affected area.

Masseuse and yoga teacher Kristi Douglas of San Diego uses CBD oil during her massage sessions to ease tight muscles and reduce inflammation and chronic pain, especially joint pain. “I have one client who is older and has hip pain due to arthritis, making it difficult for him to get around,” she says. “He rubs CBD daily on the joint now, and 30 minutes later is typically pain-free and able to move better.” Indeed, the *European Pain Journal* reported an inflammation decrease and arthritis improvement after four consecutive days of treatment with CBD topical gel. For neck pain, Douglas favors a balm made by Charlotte's Web.



Another client had terrible neuropathic pain and Douglas couldn't help, as he couldn't tolerate being touched. He ended up using CBD oral tincture plus cream to manage the pain severity and miraculously ran up the stairs the same day. And science has shown a benefit. The *Journal of Experimental Medicine* found there were significant results for chronic neuropathic pain with CBD.

Still, for her own severe pain from an old wrist injury, Douglas uses a 3:1 combination oil (THC:CBD) made by Papa & Barkley. "The combination is definitely better for intense pain," she says.

Anxiety

Very low doses of CBD have been shown to elicit wakefulness, while a dropper—about one milliliter—or more of tincture may begin to improve relaxation, according to a pharmacist at Med Men NYC. The label on the Papa & Barkley CBD tincture suggests using one dropper to start out and taking it throughout the day, as needed; it can take 15 minutes to an hour for there to be a meaningful effect.

Sex and relationship coach Ashley Manta of California says she uses CBD for anxiety regularly. "I love Foria's Flow vape pen, which is made from broad-spectrum hemp-CBD oil. I keep it in my purse and pull it out when I'm in traffic or having a rough day and just need something to take the edge off." Broad- or full-spectrum CBD includes all elements of the hemp plant, which together may have a synergistic therapeutic value.

For those wanting to avoid vapes, there are tinctures, or soft gels or capsules. Plus-CBD Oil says they are the simplest way to get an exact dose of CBD. Dosing in general, however, is not standardized. "The FDA does not regulate CBD for most conditions," notes *Medical News Today*. "As a result, dosages are currently open to interpretation, and people should treat them with caution." However, the National Cancer Institute says it's virtually impossible to overdose on CBD or THC.

Sleep

Manta uses a combination approach for sleep. "I take a 1:1 CBD to THC tincture, tea, or edible before bed," she says. "I like

to go the ingestion route because, although it can take up to two hours to kick in, it lasts for four to eight hours, which is helpful for staying asleep. If you're worried about morning grogginess, try it for the first time on a night that you don't have to get up early the next day, to see how it works for your body. With edibles, the golden rule is to start low, go slow, so if you're a new consumer, 2.5 mg to 5 mg THC maximum."

CBD alone for sleep was evaluated by the *Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* at doses of 40, 80, and 160 mg. It found the highest dose acted like a sedative while the lower dose was better for anxiety-induced insomnia. Even at the highest dose, no toxicity was observed.

Sexual Arousal

Who needs sleep anyway? Research indicates that the endocannabinoid system—affected by both CBD and THC—is involved in female sexual arousal, according to the *Journal of Sexual Medicine*. "Arousal is a complicated and multifaceted process," says Manta, a columnist at Leafly working on a book on CBD/THC and intimacy. A trauma-trained victim advocate, Manta struggles with painful sex resulting from past sexual trauma. "Cannabis products can help address the things getting in the way of arousal, like pain, stress, worry, and feeling disconnected from one's body. CBD-rich products are thought to combat anxiety and address inflammation, while THC-dominant products can be helpful for folks hoping to heighten sensation."

Manta recommends Foria Awaken—a broad-spectrum CBD oil (available in all 50 states)—applied to the vulva 20 minutes before sex. "I find that it decreases painful sensations while heightening pleasure and increasing my access to orgasm." Manta is a brand ambassador for Foria products.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA (THC)

Most people—64 percent of registered medical marijuana patients in the states that collect data—use it for pain, according to *Marijuana Business Daily*.

Indeed, a writer from New York City who we'll call Jennifer was running a marathon when she developed a neuroma on her foot. At mile nine, with tears streaming, she decided to finish. Later, she discovered that marijuana managed her pain better than CBD.

Rather than smoking, she created her own edibles by heating a piece of bud to 280 degrees on a baking sheet, then eating it. "It doesn't get you high," she says. "It's like taking an Aleve."

Different medical marijuana strains have different effects. Peace Naturals Dispensary in Canada says *indica* has a higher CBD content and is better for relaxation and nighttime use, while *sativa* is lower in CBD and more energizing. Hybrid strains use a combination approach; a dispensary can advise. Marijuana has been touted to improve certain conditions without evidence. But that could change, as the National Institutes of Health spent \$140 million toward cannabis research two years ago.

CBD products are available at dispensaries, health food stores, and on the Internet. Healthline lists some top brands. For THC, a dispensary will provide the best guidance.

THC stays in the bloodstream for up to 30 days depending on dose and frequency. Even if someone uses it irregularly, a THC test will be positive during that time. *Forbes* reported on a Johns Hopkins study that found one-third of CBD study participants also tested positive for THC, as CBD can contain up to 0.3 percent THC. If your company drug tests, or you're thinking of changing jobs, keep this in mind.

For all products, follow dosage instructions for optimal results. Also, consult with your doctor before taking a cannabinoid product, especially if you take prescription medications, OTC drugs, or supplements regularly. Rest assured that medical records are private. **DW**

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