

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a viral disease of the liver that afflicts an estimated four million Americans. Chronic hepatitis C is typically associated with fatigue, depression, joint pain and liver impairment, including cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Patients diagnosed with hepatitis C frequently report using cannabis to treat both symptoms of the disease as well as the nausea associated with antiviral therapy.[1-2] An observational study by investigators at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) found that hepatitis C patients who used cannabis were significantly more likely to adhere to their treatment regimen than patients who didn't use it.[3] Nevertheless, no clinical trials assessing the use of cannabinoids for this indication are available in the scientific literature.

Preclinical data indicates that the endocannabinoid system may moderate aspects of chronic liver disease[4-5] and that cannabinoids may reduce inflammation in experimental models of hepatitis.[6] Some other clinical reviews have reported a positive association between daily cannabis use and the progression of liver fibrosis (excessive tissue build up) and steatosis (excessive fat build up) in select hepatitis C patients.[7-9] However, more recent trial data reports that cannabis smoking is not associated with the promotion of liver disease in Hep C subjects. [10]

Experts possess divergent opinions regarding the therapeutic use of cannabinoids for hepatitis C treatment. Writing in the October 2006 issue of the *European Journal of Gastroenterology*, investigators from Canada and Germany concluded that cannabis' "potential benefits of a higher likelihood of treatment success [for hepatitis c patients] appear to outweigh [its] risks." [11] By contrast, other experts discourage the use of cannabis in patients with chronic hepatitis until further studies are performed.[12-16]

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