

CANNABIS AND MENTAL HEALTH FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

The medicinal properties of the cannabis plant have been known for millennia. As far back as 2800 BC, cannabis was used to treat a vast array of health problems and was listed in Emperor Shen Nung's pharmacopeia.

Keywords: cannabis, plain, pharmacopeia

Cannabis has a long and colorful history. The use of cannabis originated in central Asia or western China. Cannabis has been used for its alleged healing properties for millennia. The first documented case of its use dates back to 2800 BC, when it was listed in the Emperor Shen Nung's (regarded as the father of Chinese medicine) pharmacopeia. Therapeutic indications of cannabis are mentioned in the texts of the Indian Hindus, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans. These texts reported cannabis to treat a vast array of different health problems, including arthritis, depression, amenorrhea, inflammation, pain, lack of appetite and asthma.

Hindu legend holds that Shiva, the supreme Godhead of many sects, was given the title 'The Lord of Bhang', because the cannabis plant was his favorite food. The ancient Hindus thought the medicinal benefits of cannabis were explained by pleasing the gods such as Shiva. Ancient Hindu texts attribute the onset of fever with



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the 'hot breath of the gods' who were angered by the afflicted person's behavior. Using cannabis in religious rites appeases the gods and hence reduces the fever.

Recent scientific evidence provides an alternative explanation of course. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) acts on the hypothalamus to reduce body temperature.

A brief timeline of cannabis and cannabinoid research

2800 BC

Cannabis was listed in Emperor Shen Nung's pharmacopeia.

BC

Hindu legend holds that Shiva was given the title 'The Lord of Bhang' because the cannabis plant was his favorite food.

129-200 AD

Galen used cannabis for its therapeutic properties and mood enhancement.

1841

William Brooke O'Shaughnessy introduced cannabis to Western medicine after living in India. He wrote of many therapeutic uses of cannabis, including a case where cannabis stopped convulsions in a child.

1898

Dunstan and Henry isolated cannabinol (CBN).

1936

The film Reefer Madness was released, demonizing cannabis as a highly addictive drug that caused mental disorder and violence.



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1937

The uses of cannabis for medicinal and recreational purposes were effectively taxed out of existence in the USA by the Marijuana Tax Act.

1940s

Adams and Todd independently isolated cannabidiol (CBD).

1964

Mechoulam (pictured with Dave Allsop) isolated THC from the cannabis plant.

1970

The US introduced the Controlled Substance Act that lists cannabis as having 'no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse'.

1988

Howlett discovered CB1 receptors in the rat brain.

1992

Devane and Mechoulam discovered anandamide. 1993

Discovery of CB2 receptors.

1995

Mechoulam and Sugiura independently discovered 2-AG.

1996

California legalized medical cannabis by introducing the Compassionate

Use Act.

1999



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Endocannabinoids discovered to activate TRPV1 receptors (these are the receptors activated by the spicy compound in chili)

2007

Endocannabinoids shown to activate GPR55.

2012

CBD is shown to alleviate schizophrenia symptoms in patients comparable to a conventional antipsychotic drug.

2016

Australia legalized medical cannabis and its cultivation for medical purposes.

2017

CBD demonstrated to reduce seizures in childhood epilepsy in a placebo-controlled trial.

What is cannabis?

The cannabis plant is a member of the nettle family that has grown wild throughout the world for centuries. People have used it for lots of reasons, including to relax.

It comes in two main forms:

- Resin, which is a brown-black lump also known as bhang, ganja or hashish;
- Herbal cannabis, which is made up of the dried leaves and flowering tops, and is known as weed, grass, marijuana, spliff etc.



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Different kinds of cannabis have different strengths. Skunk cannabis is made from a cannabis plant that has more active chemicals in it (THC), and it can have a stronger effect on your brain.

However, cannabis varies a lot in strength, so you will not be able to tell exactly how it will make you feel until you have taken it.

Since November 2018, specialist doctors have been able to prescribe cannabis-based medicines if it is felt their patients could benefit from them. However, this resource is focused on cannabis for recreational use.

There is some debate about whether cannabis should be legalized in the UK, like it has been in Canada and some US states.

How does cannabis affect mental health?

There is lots of different research into the effects that cannabis can have on mental health.



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Some research has shown that young people who use cannabis have an increased risk of psychosis. How strong the cannabis is you use, and how often you use it, can increase the risk of developing psychosis.

Using cannabis can also increase the risk of other mental health problems like depression and suicidal feelings.

Research suggests that people who are already at risk of developing mental health problems might be at an increased risk of showing symptoms if they use cannabis regularly. There is also evidence that if you already have a mental health problem cannabis can, in some cases, make these problems worse.

The younger you are when you start using cannabis, the more at risk of these problems you are. This is because your brain is still developing and can be more easily damaged by the chemicals in cannabis.

Stopping using cannabis can help reduce symptoms of mental health problems such as depression and psychosis. However, some people may need additional support for their mental health problems and help to stop using cannabis safely.

What about synthetic cannabinoids?

Synthetic cannabinoids are chemicals designed to have similar effects to cannabis. However, they are often a lot stronger and more likely to cause mental and physical illness.



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Research has shown that synthetic cannabinoids are associated with delirium (feeling confused or unaware of where you are), agitation, hallucinations, violence and self-harm.

In the past, synthetic cannabinoids were legal and known as 'legal highs'. This is one of the reasons that people sometimes think they are safer than cannabis. However, many synthetic cannabinoids are now illegal, and in many cases they can be more dangerous than cannabis.

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