

Gastrointestinal Disorders

Gastrointestinal (GI) disorders, including functional bowel diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease and colitis, afflict more than one in five Americans, particularly women. While some GI disorders may be controlled by diet and pharmaceutical medications, others are poorly moderated by conventional treatments. Symptoms of GI disorders often include cramping, abdominal pain, inflammation of the lining of the large and/or small intestine, chronic diarrhea, rectal bleeding and weight loss.

Although several anecdotal reports^[1-2] and a handful of case reports^[3-4] exist in the scientific literature supporting the use of cannabinoids to treat symptoms of GI disorders, virtually no clinical trial work has been performed in this area, aside from a 2007 clinical study assessing the impact of oral THC on colonic motility.^[5]

However, numerous preclinical studies demonstrate that activation of the CB1 and CB2 cannabinoid receptors exert biological functions on the gastrointestinal tract.^[6] Effects of their activation in animals include suppression of gastrointestinal motility,^[7] inhibition of intestinal secretion,^[8] reduced acid reflux^[9] and protection from inflammation,^[10] as well as the promotion of epithelial wound healing in human tissue.^[11] As a result, many experts now believe that cannabinoids and/or modulation of the endogenous cannabinoid system represents a novel therapeutic approach for the treatment of numerous GI disorders — including inflammatory bowel diseases, functional bowel diseases, gastro-oesophageal reflux conditions, secretory diarrhea, gastric ulcers and colon cancer.^[12-14]

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