

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.

Scientists theorize that the endocannabinoid system may moderate aspects of chronic liver disease¹⁻² Population data shows that adults with a history of cannabis use are less likely to suffer from specific liver problems, such as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), than non-users. Specifically, a 2017 University of Massachusetts study reported that frequent consumers of cannabis were 52 percent less likely to be diagnosed with NAFLD as compared to non-users, while occasional consumers were 15 percent less likely to suffer from the disease.³ A Stanford University study similarly reported that cannabis use independently predicted a lower risk of suspected NAFLD in a dose-dependent manner. "Active marijuana use provided a protective effect against NAFLD independent of known metabolic risk factors," authors concluded.⁴

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.⁵⁻⁶ An observational study by investigators at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) reports that hepatitis C patients who used cannabis were significantly more likely to adhere to their treatment regimen than patients who didn't use it.⁷

While some older observational studies cautioned that heavy cannabis use among hepatitis C patients may adversely impact the liver,⁸⁻¹⁰ more recent studies report that cannabis inhalation is not associated with the promotion of liver disease in hepatitis C subjects,¹¹ and, in some cases, may even act as a protective agent against steatosis.¹² Separate longitudinal data finds that patients co-infected with hepatitis C and HIV who consume cannabis are also less likely to suffer from insulin resistance as compared to non-users.¹³

Experts in the field offer divergent opinions regarding the therapeutic use of cannabinoids for hepatitis C treatment. While some experts opine that cannabis' "potential benefits of a higher likelihood of treatment success [for hepatitis C patients] appear to outweigh [its] risks"¹⁴ others discourage the use of cannabis in patients with chronic hepatitis until further studies are performed.¹⁵⁻¹⁹

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