

Relationship Between Marijuana and Opioids

Cannabis access is associated with reduced rates of opioid use and abuse, opioid-related hospitalizations, opioid-related traffic fatalities, opioid-related drug treatment admissions, and opioid-related overdose deaths

“Patients with chronic pain profit from long-term CAM [medical cannabinoids] which safely and significantly lower the consumption of co-medicated opioids, even at low dosages (< 7.5 mg/day). Older patients benefit from CAM, and adverse effects do not limit the (chronic) use and prescription of CAM in the elderly.”

[Cannabinoids reduce opioid use in older patients with pain: A retrospective three-year analysis of data from a general practice, Schmerz, 2022](#)

“The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the effects of long-term cannabis-based oil consumption on the distribution of patients with an opioid prescription, within patients with a chronic pain condition. ... Analyses by subgroups showed a statistically significant difference in the proportion of female opioid non-users before and after cannabis-based oil treatment (34.1% to 56.1%), as well as in the proportion of under-65 years old opioid non-users before and after cannabis-based oil treatment (32.5% to 55%), in the proportion of opioid non-users with non-severe comorbidity (33.3% to 54.2%), and ... in the proportion of opioid non-users with a chronic pain condition (32.6% to 59.2%).”

[Long-term cannabis-based oil therapy and pain medications prescribing patterns: An Italian observational study, European Review for Medical and Pharmacological Sciences, 2022](#)

Cannabis access is associated with reductions in overall prescription drug activity

“[W]e sought to capture the medically relevant features of cannabis use in a population of patients with orthopedic pain and pair these data with objective measures of pain and prescription drug use. ... Medical cannabis use was associated with clinical improvements in pain, function, and quality of life with reductions in prescription drug use; 73% either ceased or decreased opioid consumption and 31% discontinued benzodiazepines.”

[Perceived efficacy, reduced prescription drug use, and minimal side effects of cannabis in patients with chronic orthopedic pain, Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research, 2021](#)

The adjunctive use of cannabis augments the analgesic properties of opioids

“This Phase II study evaluated analgesia, abuse liability, and cognitive performance of hydromorphone and oral...THC (dronabinol) using a within-subject, double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled, human laboratory trial. ... These data suggest that dronabinol may enhance the analgesic effects of a *low dose* of hydromorphone, indicative of possible opioid-sparing effects, but that this effect only occurs within a narrow dose range beyond which hyperalgesia, increased risk for AEs [adverse events], and abuse liability are more likely to occur.”

[Within-subject, double-blinded, randomized, and placebo-controlled evaluation of the combined effects of the cannabinoid dronabinol and the opioid hydromorphone in a human laboratory model, Neuropsychopharmacology, 2021](#)

Patients often use cannabis as a substitute for other controlled substances, including prescription medications, alcohol, and tobacco

“Among our subjects, over 90 percent of CU [cannabis users] and PU [past users] reported “a little” or “great” relief from symptoms with MC [medical cannabis] and 61.20 percent claimed that MC had allowed them to reduce or discontinue use of other medications.”

[Utilization of medicinal cannabis for pain by individuals with spinal cord injury, Spinal Cord Series and Cases, 2020](#)

“RCLs (recreational cannabis laws) and, to a lesser extent, MCLs (medical cannabis laws) reduce the total days supply of NSAIDs, the number of different patients to whom providers prescribe NSAIDs, and the likelihood that a provider prescribes any NSAIDs.”

[The impact of cannabis access laws on opioid prescribing, Journal of Health Economics, 2019](#)

Chronic pain patients are less likely to abuse medicinal cannabis as compared to opioids

“Generally, rates of problematic use of MC (medicinal cannabis) among MC users seem lower than rates of problematic use of opioids among those prescribed opioids,”

[Problematic use of prescription opioids and medicinal cannabis among patients suffering from chronic pain, Pain Medicine, 2016](#)

Chronic pain patients are less likely to become depressed using medical cannabis

“Levels of depression and anxiety are higher among chronic pain patients receiving prescription opioids compared to those receiving MM. Findings should be taken into consideration when deciding on the most appropriate treatment modality for chronic pain, particularly among those at risk for depression and anxiety.”

[Depression and anxiety among chronic pain patients receiving prescription opioids and medical marijuana, Journal of Affective Disorders, 2017](#)

Cannabis use is associated with greater rates of opioid use treatment retention and may mitigate opioid-related cravings

“Participants receiving pharmacological treatment for OUD (n = 2315) were recruited from community-based addiction treatment clinics in Ontario, Canada, and provided information on past-month cannabis use (self-report). We found that amongst cannabis users, those who use cannabis daily are less likely to have opioid use than people who use cannabis occasionally. This association was present for both men and women.”

[The association between cannabis use and outcome in pharmacological treatment for opioid use disorder, Harm Reduction Journal, 2021](#)

“[W]e found that among more than 800 participants on OAT [opioid agonist therapy, e.g., methadone and/or naltrexone] in Vancouver, Canada, use of cannabis was longitudinally associated with a substantially lower risk of being exposed to fentanyl. ...findings from this study support the experimental evaluation of cannabinoids as a potential adjunct therapy to OAT to improve clinical outcomes, particularly to reduce the risk of relapse to illicit opioid use (i.e., fentanyl) and associated risk of overdose and death.”

[Cannabis use is associated with reduced risk of exposure to fentanyl among people on opioid agonist therapy during a community-wide overdose crisis, Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2020](#)