

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an inflammatory disease of the joints characterized by pain, stiffness, and swelling, as well as an eventual loss of limb function. Rheumatoid arthritis affects about one percent of the population, primarily women.

Cannabinoids, including CBD, are acknowledged to possess anti-inflammatory, anti-arthritis, and anti-rheumatic properties,¹⁻⁴ and the endocannabinoid system has been proposed as modulator of RA.⁵⁻⁶

Nonetheless, few human studies are available assessing the use of either cannabis or cannabinoids in patients with RA. In one such trial, investigators reported that the administration of cannabis extracts over a five-week period produced statistically significant improvements in pain on movement, pain at rest, quality of sleep, inflammation and intensity of pain compared to placebo.⁷ Other human trials assessing the use of synthetic cannabinoid agents in patients with rheumatic diseases have yielded mixed results.⁸ A review of the relevant literature, published in 2021 in the *Journal of Clinical Rheumatology*, identified 26 systematic review papers. Authors concluded: "Cannabis, cannabis-derived products and synthetic cannabinoids may slightly reduce disease activity in patients with RA." They cautioned, however, "Its use may result in little to no difference in pain reduction and may slightly increase nervous system adverse events. The evidence is very uncertain about the effect of cannabis, cannabis-derived products, and synthetic cannabinoids on serious adverse events risk."⁹ Additional human trials, such as an assessment of the use of CBD in patients with osteoarthritis, are ongoing.¹⁰

Despite these limited results, patients with RA frequently report using cannabis therapeutically. For instance, in a 2005 anonymous questionnaire survey of medicinal cannabis patients in Australia, 25 percent reported using cannabinoids to treat RA.¹¹ A survey of British medical cannabis patients found that more than 20 percent of respondents reported using cannabis for symptoms of arthritis.¹² A review of state-registered medical cannabis pain patients reported that 27 percent used it to treat arthritis.¹³ Most recently, survey data published in 2020 in the journal *Rheumatology* reported: "Nearly 20 percent of patients suffering from rheumatologic diseases actively consume cannabis, with an improvement in pain. ... A favorable effect of cannabis on pain in our meta-analysis reinforces the idea that cannabis could be used for analgesic purposes."¹⁴

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