

CBD And Lupus: The Future Of Treating Autoimmune Diseases

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CBD offers hope in the treatment of Lupus and autoimmune diseases without the side effects of pharmaceuticals

Five million people worldwide suffer from joint pain, rashes, and chronic fatigue due to systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), an autoimmune condition. There is no cure and few options for help for the sometimes debilitating symptoms. There is hope, though. As the restrictions on research and the use of cannabis are lifted, more lupus and autoimmune disease sufferers may find relief through the use of CBD. The research on cannabis is also pointing the way to a better understanding of how our bodies work to fight pain and inflammation;

the insight that may prove to be invaluable for the millions suffering from a host of autoimmune diseases.

Dr. Patricia Frye of Takoma Park Integrative Care in Maryland, and the author of *Medical Marijuana*, prescribes cannabis for her patients for a variety of conditions. Cannabis, as well as CBD, help modulate the symptoms of autoimmune disorders like SLE, or lupus. In addition, it can be more efficacious and comes with fewer side effects than pharmaceuticals.

“It generally has an overall anti-inflammatory effect,” Frye says.

Long-Term Effects Of Cannabis

Another benefit of cannabis is that it doesn't appear to have the long-term effects on the body that pharmaceuticals do. In her blog [*Lupus Rebel*](#), lupus sufferer and functional medicine practitioner Dr. Connie Jeon notes that pharmaceutical medications often end up changing the body's homeostasis so that people become dependent on them: “The meds don't allow you to achieve optimal functionality, rather, they keep you at declining functionality,” she says.

Research into the use of cannabis to treat symptoms of lupus so far supports the use of cannabis to help ease symptoms and reduce flare-ups. Recently, researchers at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research on Long Island, New York, announced a new study to look at the effectiveness of synthetic cannabinoids on joint pain for people suffering from lupus. They believe the drug Lenabasum is better positioned to treat inflammation because it does not have mood- or behavior-altering properties.

However, patients may not have to wait for these drugs to come into development if they want to avoid mental side effects. These effects come from another part of the cannabis plant, tetrahydrocannabinol

(THC). In fact, some clinicians argue, it can be beneficial to prescribe formulas that contain both CBD and THC, as long as the dosage is correct.

CBD vs. THC: What's The Difference?

In order to understand how CBD and THC work in the body, it's important to understand exactly what they are. Hemp and marijuana are two different plants in the cannabis plant family. Several different compounds in cannabis plants have medicinal effects. Cannabidiol (CBD) and tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) are two of the most well-known and widely used. By using plant compounds from hemp, rather than marijuana, the risk of addiction is avoided. While marijuana plants contain 50 to 60 percent THC (the mind-altering component), hemp plants contain less than .3 percent. The World Health Organization has recognized that cannabidiol in its pure form does not present a risk of addiction and therefore does not need to be scheduled as a controlled substance.

CBD And THC For Mental Health

Dr. Frye, who prescribes both to patients, believes CBD and THC together are often more effective than conventional treatments because they have fewer side effects. They are well tolerated at high doses and are overall more efficacious. She explains that CBD works to help quell inflammation and ease anxiety, whereas THC helps with pain and associated symptoms of depression.

“We've seen dramatic improvements in patients with autoimmune conditions,” Frye says. The combination can have a powerful effect on alleviating joint pain, reducing flare-ups, and decreasing the severity of flares.

In addition, when CBD is combined with THC, CBD works naturally to decrease any psychoactive effects of THC. Dr. Frye usually recommends formulas that provide higher doses of CBD than THC. She believes this combination is particularly effective for patients suffering from insomnia.

“CBD is energizing at low doses and sedating at higher doses. Sometimes taking an even bigger dose at night can help with sleep,” she explains.

CBD can also help with anxiety, which is also common among patients with autoimmune diseases. “It’s one of the best medicines for anxiety anywhere,” says Dr. Frye.

The Endocannabinoid System And Lupus

Research into CBD treatment for lupus is helping investigators understand not only autoimmune diseases. It is also helping them understand a whole system in the body called the endocannabinoid system (ECS).

In a study published in *The Journal of Immunology*, Indian researchers found a connection between mutations of a gene associated with the endocannabinoid system and lupus.

Unknown until recently, the ECS, according to [Dr. Ethan Russo](#), past president of the International Cannabinoid Research Society, is “an essential regulatory mechanism in the body’s biochemistry and physiology, the basic machinery of everyday life.”

CBD works with the body's endocannabinoid system to keep the body in balance by attaching to our cells and literally rewiring our genes. Dr. Jeon further explains: “CBD modulates the transcription of over 1100 genes that activate the signaling molecules that naturally reduce

inflammation in our central nervous system and throughout our immune system.”

The body manufactures its own endocannabinoids: anandamide and 2AG. When these are low in the body, phytocannabinoids extracted from plants like hemp can help the body retain homeostasis, according to [Dr. Gary Gettelfinger](#).

The use of full-spectrum hemp oil can be beneficial for easing pain and inflammation and can help keep cartilage and joints healthy. As joint pain and inflammation are two common symptoms of lupus sufferers, the growing body of research into ECS offers hope for those with SLE.

What To Look For In CBD Products

Dr. Frye emphasizes the importance of seeking out quality sources of CBD, especially in oils. She also recommends getting help from a qualified healthcare provider knowledgeable about CBD. Because of the lack of regulation, there are many poor quality CBD products on the market; consumers should look for oils from hemp grown in the United States or Europe from organically certified growers.

Both Dr. Frye and Dr. Jeon also stress the importance of a holistic approach to treatment for patients with lupus. That includes an anti-inflammatory diet and mind-body techniques such as yoga to complement cannabis-based treatments.

With more research into the important role that endocannabinoids play in the body, along with the growing numbers of patients finding relief with CBD, the outlook for people coping with lupus, as well as other autoimmune diseases, is brighter than ever.