

CBD Oil: Should You Try It for Arthritis Symptoms?

CBD oil has been hyped as the next big solution for everything – from chronic pain and depression to anxiety and so much more. But is it effective for arthritis symptoms? The jury is still out.

| By Linda Rath

What is CBD?

Two kinds of the cannabis sativa plant, hemp and marijuana, produce chemical compounds called cannabinoids. Cannabidiol (CBD) is one type of cannabinoid, but it doesn't get you high. THC – another cannabinoid – is the psychoactive part of marijuana and does get you high. Most CBD products come from hemp, which must have less than 0.3 THC present.

You might be surprised to learn that your body makes its own cannabinoids (called endocannabinoids) and has cannabinoid receptors, some related to inflammation and pain. Researchers once thought the CBD in products attached to these receptors, but now they suspect CBD helps your body use its own endocannabinoids more effectively.

Can it help arthritis symptoms?

Some preliminary research suggests that CBD may help with arthritis pain. In animal studies, which may not translate to humans, CBD relieved arthritis pain and inflammation. On the other hand, results of human studies are mixed. For example, a 2016 analysis of human trials for RA, OA and fibromyalgia found that CBD improved pain and sleep, but the studies were small and of poor quality.

Even so, Daniel Clauw, MD, a professor at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and an expert in chronic pain, doesn't write off CBD's potential benefits and recommends it to some of his patients.

"A recent trial* showed CBD alone was effective in [the treatment of] knee OA, and it appears as though it is very safe," he says. "Nearly all potential side effects of cannabinoids are from THC, not CBD."

Here are his suggestions if you want to try it:

- Use low doses, which seem to work best for pain relief.
- Start with a CBD-only product, 5 – 10mg twice daily, and then slowly increase, going up to dose of 50 – 100mg per day. If that doesn't help, try a CBD product with a low dose of THC.

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- Use only at night at first; slowly increase dose if needed.
- Edibles' effects last longer than vaping, so don't try them until you know what CBD strain and dose work for you.
- Use caution if you are 25 years old or younger and using CBD products that contain THC. This age group is at highest risk of addiction, dependency or even psychosis.

Is CBD legal?

It's complicated. State laws regulating the sale, production and possession of CBD oil widely vary, and many states allow some form of CBD. If passed, new provisions in this year's Farm Bill would legalize industrial hemp and could make hemp-derived CBD oil legal in all 50 states. But be aware that except for an FDA-approved medication for childhood epilepsy, the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration still maintains that CBD is illegal.

Choosing a Product

CBD comes in many forms, including capsules, extracts, honey-infusions, topical ointments and edibles. But because CBD isn't FDA-regulated, it's important to be cautious when choosing a product. In fact, ConsumerLab.com found that the amount of CBD in products may vary widely – from 2 mg to 22 mg per dose – and the strength isn't always accurately disclosed on the label. (The amount of any incidental THC may not be accurately disclosed either).

If you want to try CBD, discuss it with your doctor first and do your homework. Talk to a practitioner who is familiar with CBD oil and contact the manufacturer to see proof of a third-party analysis for purity and potency.

If you live in a state that has legalized medical marijuana, Clauw suggests purchasing from dispensaries that work with medicinal users rather than just recreational users. Using ConsumerLab.com to help you choose a product is also a good option, he adds.