

# Cannabis provides some reduction in neuropathic pain

Daily POEMs

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## Clinical question

Is smoked cannabis an effective treatment for chronic neuropathic pain?

## Bottom line

Smoked cannabis reduces the intensity of neuropathic pain and improves sleep, though the benefits are modest. (LOE = 1b)

## Reference

Ware MA, Wang T, Shapiro S, et al. Smoked cannabis for chronic neuropathic pain: a randomized controlled trial. *CMAJ* 2010;182(14):E694-E701.

**Study design:** Cross-over trial (randomized)

**Funding source:** Government

**Setting:** Outpatient (specialty)

## Synopsis

In this Canadian trial, the researchers identified 21 adults with neuropathic pain for at least 3 months following trauma or surgery. Patients with pain that was not neuropathic, not caused by surgery, who were already using cannabis, who were older than 70 years, had logistical or transportation problems, or had significant comorbidities were excluded. A large number (25 of the 116 originally approached) were excluded for "other reasons." There were four 5-day treatment periods, separated by 9-day washout periods. Two patients left the study during the initial treatment period: one because THC was detected in his bloodstream while he was in the placebo group and one because of worsening pain. During each treatment period, patients were randomly assigned to receive placebo or 25 mg of 1 of 3 cannabis doses (2.5%, 6.0%, and 9.4% tetrahydrocannabinol [THC]) 3 times daily. Treatment was administered via a titanium 1-hit pipe (RayDialTor, Mori Designs, Auburn, WA), and outcomes included pain and sleep scores, as well as assessments of how happy, stressed, high, and relaxed they felt. Analysis was by intention to treat, patients and outcome assessors were masked, and no patients were lost to follow-up (who would leave this study?). The authors found that only the highest dose of cannabis had statistically significant benefits. These benefits were modest, though, and were of borderline significance, but included reduced pain (5.4 vs 6.1 on an 11-point scale) and improved sleep. They detected no safety problems or mood changes during this short study -- though, of course, smoking anything daily for the rest of your life may carry pulmonary and cardiovascular risks. Eighteen of the participants had used marijuana in the past.

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