

FEATURED ARTICLE



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CBD 101: HOW & WHY DOES IT WORK?

Over the last few years I have had more and more patients come to me to ask my opinion on the use of cannabis as an alternate treatment for pain, addiction, mood disorders (anxiety), immune and neurological conditions, and cancer. Because of its limited psychoactive effect, CBD is the component patients most often inquire about. The importance of this phytochemical is growing as a result of our recent changes in access to cannabis and developing research on this and other cannabinoids. The following is some basic information on CBD to know when considering using this medicine for chronic conditions when pharmaceutical approaches either don't work or have too many side effects.

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What is CBD?

CBD or cannabidiol is a phytocannabinoid that is only one of over 100 cannabinoids identified from the Cannabis plant. It is oil soluble and can be taken by mouth (spray or swallowed) and inhalation (smoke or vapour). It does not have the intoxicating effects as THC. It is generally well tolerated but may have certain side effects including fatigue, diarrhea, reduced appetite and poor sleep quality. It's biochemical effects are a result of helping regulate the endocannabinoid receptors in our body as well as other neurotransmitter receptors such as serotonin.

The Endocannabinoid System (ECS): The mechanisms of why CBD works has to do with our own cannabinoid receptors (CB1 and CB2), which are part of the endocannabinoid system (ECS) in our bodies. This is a system of cell receptors that respond to certain kinds of molecules called cannabinoids; two of which our bodies produce endogenously (called anandamide and 2-Ag). The purpose of this system is to help with aspects of sleep, digestion, hunger, mood, motor control, immune function, and reproduction, pleasure, pain, and memory and temperature regulation.

Why CBD works: CBD works on helping our own endogenous (or self producing) cannabinoids work longer and stronger. It helps maintain an optimal balance of endocannabinoids. So, when the body does not produce enough endocannabinoids or cannot regulate them properly, one can become susceptible to conditions that this system is meant to regulate (such as fibromyalgia, anxiety and irritable bowel syndrome, to name a few).

Not just Cannabis: Interestingly, cannabis derived CBD is only one way to support this important system in our body. Evidence has shown that omega 3 fish oils help us produce more of our own cannabinoids. There have also been other plants identified that contain cannabinoids that support the ECS. These include: Echinacea species, *Radula marginata* (liverwort) and *Helichrysum unbraculigerum* amongst others.

We are in a dynamic time in researching plant medicine. Cannabis has helped us start to understand the complex human endocannabinoid system and its importance in regulating our bodies. It has also helped us identify other plants that contain cannabinoids, which could also provide relief from many chronic conditions.