

Cannabis Assisted Mental & Emotional Health

This info sheet is the product of Dr Bassal's training and experience over 45 years as a Medical Doctor, 20 years as a psychotherapist and 5 years as an Authorised cannabis prescriber. It combines his research, knowledge and feedback from his patients.

The Issue of Mental/Emotional Health.

All people at some time in their lives have to cope with mental and emotional stresses. It's an inescapable part of being human. It's therefore quite natural for many people to seek assistance to help them get through. Some turn to friends and family and other turn to doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists for support. Often that support includes pharmaceutical medication for the short or long term.

Pharmaceutical Medications for Mental / Emotional Health.

Pharmaceuticals such as anti-depressants (SSRI), anti-psychotics and anti-anxiety medications are prescribed in large quantities. In Australia alone, 41million prescriptions costing \$1.62 billion for the government and \$750 million for the private sector are dispensed each year.

1. Effects occur both immediately and over time
2. Different classes of medications have distinct mechanisms
3. Individual response varies significantly based on individual, genetic and environmental factors
4. Full therapeutic effects often take several weeks to develop

These medications usually work by modifying brain chemistry, mostly by blocking receptors, enzymes or metabolic pathways. The idea is that blocking something negative should equal something positive.

While many patients benefit from such medications, many do not. About 30-40% of patients don't respond adequately, side effects lead to discontinuation in 15-20% of cases, multiple medication trials are often needed before finding an effective treatment which may frequently require a combination of drugs.

Furthermore, stopping those medications requires experienced supervision as serious withdrawal effects occur if they are stopped suddenly.

How does Cannabis differ from Pharmaceuticals.

A crucial difference is that our bodies produce cannabis like molecules called endocannabinoids that form part of our endocannabinoid system (ECS).

The ECS plays a crucial role in regulating brain neurotransmitters and plays a role in sleep, mood regulation and management of anxiety amongst other effects. In other words, cannabis can be said to be a 'pro' rather than 'anti' molecule, it boosts your own natural homeostatic mechanisms to produce a sought-after state of calmness or contentment by mediating oxytocin receptors, elevating dopamine and serotonin levels and reducing adrenalin.

What is meant by Cannabis Assisted Mental & Emotional Health?

The ECS is expressed in all brain regions that are important for the processing of anxiety, fear, and anger and serves as a regulatory buffer system for emotional responses, aiming to establish a balance between distress and well-being.

Supplementing the ECS with medically supervised prescriptions of cannabis products aims to assist with the natural mental and emotional regulation which has become inadequate. Cannabis can be combined with psychological support, which makes outcomes more likely to be successful as one feels less overwhelmed and more able to do the mental /emotional processing in order to gain deeper insight and change old patterns.

Cannabis and Generalised Anxiety Disorders. (GAD)

Using the right dose of cannabis can produce a down-regulation of the fight/flight mechanism which is commonly over stimulated in GAD. People often describe feeling more 'present' more aware of their senses and seeing things from a higher perspective. "More in touch with my feelings but not hooked in by them" A.T. 48 y/o male.

The physical sensations of anxiety may become less intense and shorter in duration. Anxious thoughts may become less negative or quieten down. leading to feeling calmer, more settled and more stable. Patients find themselves needing to adapt to an unfamiliar state of mental and physical calmness.

Since Indica-dominant strains are typically linked to calming the body and mental relaxation, they may be

more suitable for reducing anxiety, especially in the evening, nighttime and for sleep.

Cannabis and OCD

The intrusive thoughts and compulsive behaviours associated with typical OCD have less traction with cannabis treatment. "My OCD thoughts don't grab me like they used to, I can ignore them more easily and not do what they say, I can now get out my house, without washing and checking, I feel much freer," D.D. 34 y/o female.

Cannabis and ADHD

"My mind is not so all-over-the-place. I can focus more on what I'm doing" D.G. 33y/o male

"My creative side gets to lead, not drowned out by my inner criticisms and doubts" TY 23 y/o female

"My body isn't on edge like with Ritalin or Dex" D.C. 59 y/o/ male

Cannabis and PTSD & CPTSD

Cannabis activates CB₁ receptors in the hippocampus and amygdala which decrease hyperarousal and intrusive memories and other PTSD symptoms such as flash backs, nightmares and over reactions.

Participants who used cannabis were 2.57 times more likely to no longer meet DSM-5 criteria for PTSD at the end of the study observation period compared to participants who did not use cannabis.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33998874>

"I've stopped thinking of the armed robbery and I'm now not so jumpy, Also sleeping much better without the night terrors ." J.G. 70y/o male

Cannabis and Autism Spectrum Disorder

Cannabis and cannabinoids may have promising effects in the treatment of symptoms related to ASD such as hyperactivity, attacks of self-mutilation and anger, sleep problems, anxiety, agitation, irritability, and depression. Moreover, studies have found an improvement in cognition, sensory sensitivity, attention, social interaction, and language.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34043900>

Cannabis and Depression

Some research on animals suggests that Sativa strains can have a similar effect on depression as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) medication

"Medical cannabis was well tolerated, and dropout rate was comparable to those in clinical trials of antidepressant medication. Patients reported a clinically significant reduction of depression severity"

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38211630>

Elevation of mood, especially in the morning, can be expected. Depressive thoughts become easier to dispel resulting in more confidence and better self-esteem. Many have reported feeling less flat, more motivated, in a better mood with natural enthusiasm, and a growing desire to get going again.

Side Effects

Studies looking at the side-effect profile of medicinal cannabis products suggest they are relatively well tolerated and an initial review by the World Health Organization's Expert Committee on Drug Dependence found no associated public health risks or abuse potential.

Speed of onset

Cannabis taken as an oil, absorbed in the mouth has an effect lasting about 6-8 hrs and takes about 1-2 hours to start working while inhaled cannabis works in under 15 minutes and lasts 2-4 hours.

A combination of oral and inhaled cannabis can therefore be used to achieve a benefit within minutes and an effect lasting hours.

Warnings

The right formula, strength, dose and method of administration needs to be tailored for each individual. If the dose is too low, no benefit results and when too high, side effects such as drowsiness, light headedness even anxiety can occur. Fortunately, the side effects completely wear off within hours and are not serious.

In certain individuals, with a history or family history of certain psychotic disorders, cannabis is contraindicated. In other people a particular sensitivity or very unpleasant effects, cannabis is not suitable and needs to be ceased.

Tolerance Breaks

To reduce the likelihood of developing tolerance and needing progressively higher dose, it is recommended that you stop using cannabis for at least 2 consecutive days per month. That resets your cannabis receptors, enabling you to benefit from the same dose long term. It will also confirm if you have achieved a 'reset' and if you need to keep taking it or not.

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Dr Bassal is not affiliated with any supplier of Cannabis and declares no financial or conflict of interest.