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A photograph of a cannabis (also known as marijuana) plant. (US Fish and Wildlife Service) [Large Photo](#)

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Are the Feds Blocking Medical Marijuana Research?

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About eight out of 10 Americans favor legalizing marijuana for medicinal use. Fourteen states have now done so. The Obama administration has announced it will not prosecute medical marijuana users.

Yet the federal government is making it exceedingly difficult for research to verify that marijuana is an effective treatment for conditions ranging from glaucoma to multiple sclerosis, reported [The New York Times](#).

Many patients with conditions such as cancer, glaucoma, AIDS or chronic pain swear by marijuana's effectiveness. It appears at least as safe as many prescription drugs used for similar purposes. Yet there have been few scientific studies on it, and even fewer with conclusive results. Much of the evidence for its validity as a medical treatment is anecdotal.

In the United States, researchers who wish to study the effects of marijuana have only one source for their raw material. It is grown at the University of Mississippi, and its distribution is controlled by multiple federal agencies. To use it, researchers must apply to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and must get approvals from the DEA, FDA and a special Public Health Service panel.

The majority of research requests are denied by one or more of these agencies. If they are approved, the researchers are limited to the few varieties of marijuana grown by the university. Other varieties have somewhat different medicinal properties, which cannot be studied as long as access to them is denied. The federal government does not make it as difficult to study Ecstasy or LSD.

In 1985, the FDA approved [Marinol](#), a pill made from synthetic THC, an active chemical in marijuana. The agency claimed that it has the same medicinal effects and less risk. Many patients who have taken Marinol, however, say it did not work for them, or gave them more side effects than smoking marijuana.

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