



HOME
HEALTH

Conditions & Treatments

- Medicare & Insurance
- Health Care Reform
- Longevity
- Fitness
- Brain Health
- Doctors & Hospitals
- Caregiving
- Drugs & Supplements
- Alternative Medicine
- Medical Research
- Experts
- Health Tools
- Health Products

MONEY

WORK

PERSONAL GROWTH

POLITICS & SOCIETY

RELATIONSHIPS

HOME & GARDEN

FOOD

TRAVEL

ENTERTAINMENT

TECHNOLOGY

GIVING BACK

MEMBER BENEFITS

BULLETIN

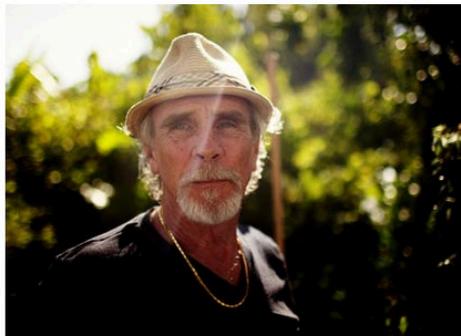
HEALTH CONSCIOUS?
Get the AARP Health Newsletter

Older Adults Increasingly Use Medical Marijuana for Nausea, Pain

It's still controversial, even where it's legal

by: Peter Jaret | from: [AARP Bulletin](#) | October 29, 2010

[Recommend \(72\)](#) | [Comments \(38\)](#) | [Share](#) | [Bookmark](#) | [Print](#) | [Enlarge](#)



Lonnie Painter is the chairman for Medical Cannabis, a collective of about 100 members that operates as a dispensary for medical marijuana in the nearby senior community of Laguna Woods Village in California. — Daryl Peveto/LUCEO

To date, 14 states and the District of Columbia have legalized medical marijuana.

And it's no surprise that some of the most impassioned advocates for access are seniors. Many of the purported health benefits of marijuana target problems that typically plague older people, such as chronic shingles, arthritis pain, loss of appetite and symptoms of multiple sclerosis.

Pot for pain

Researchers acknowledge that they're only beginning to study medical applications of marijuana. "But what we already know suggests that the active compounds in marijuana have tremendous potential," says Mark Ware, M.D., a researcher at McGill University in Montreal and executive director of the Canadian Consortium for the Investigation of Cannabinoids.

Cells throughout the body, he explains, possess receptors for cannabinoids, the active ingredients in marijuana. Interestingly, our bodies produce natural cannabinoids, which are believed to play a role in controlling nerve impulses, immune function and even bone growth. The existence of this naturally occurring system explains why marijuana, by delivering a potent dose of cannabinoids, has far-ranging effects, Ware says.

Among the best-studied benefits are [pain control](#) and [nausea relief](#). "Marijuana appears to be particularly effective at easing pain related to nerve damage, or neuropathy," says Stephen Yazulla, professor of neurobiology and behavior at Stony Brook University in New York. Neuropathy is a common complication of diabetes, cancer therapies and herpes zoster infections, or shingles. Marijuana has also been shown to help restore appetite, which can be zapped by cancer treatments. There's emerging evidence that cannabis helps control spastic muscle contractions associated with multiple sclerosis. It may also slow the course of the devastating degenerative nerve disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

Mainstream medical support

Mainstream medical organizations have acknowledged marijuana's promise. In 2008, the American College of Physicians released a position statement arguing that promising results from small studies should be an impetus to more research into the health effects of marijuana. A 2009 interim report issued by the American Medical Association also argued for more research, pointing to a variety of health benefits.

This isn't the first time the AMA has argued in favor of marijuana. Cannabis was commonly used for medicinal purposes in the United States until 1937, when the weed was declared an illegal substance by the federal government — despite the AMA's objections at the time.

Related



Daryl Peveto/LUCEO

- [Health Encyclopedia: Marijuana. Read](#)
- [Prescription Drug Addiction on the Rise. Read](#)
- [Drug-Free Remedies for Chronic Pain. Read](#)
- [More Articles on Alternative Medicine. Read](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Discover insurance plans that can help you maintain your health and your budget.

[GET A KIT](#) | [GET A QUOTE](#) | [APPLY NOW](#)

Essential Premier Health Insurance
Member of Aetna Legal

49.36.326.1-88

SERVICES & DISCOUNTS



Learn more about Medicare. Download a copy of the [Medicare Made Clear Guide](#) for your own reference.



Get 50% off a complete pair of eyeglasses* for a limited time at any JC Penney Optical location. *Some exclusions may apply.



Save on eyewear, hearing care, prescriptions, and more with AARP Health Discounts.

[See All >](#)

featured GROUPS



Fat 2 Fit
Get into the spirit of healthy living without skipping on the fun. [Discuss](#)



Breast Cancer Support
Connect with others who have been touched by cancer. [Discuss](#)

[See all health groups >](#)

stay informed

Get Healthy & Stay Healthy! [Sign Up](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

REPLAY

effective CHEMOTHERAPY in a pill

[Learn more >](#)

JOIN AARP

Get exclusive member benefits & effect social change. [Join](#)

health **POLL**

Will you get a flu vaccine this year?

- Yes, I have already.
- Yes, definitely.
- Maybe, I'm not sure yet.
- No, I'm healthy and don't need one.
- No, I hate shots.

[Vote](#)

learning **CENTERS**

Get smart strategies for managing health conditions.

- [Arthritis](#)
- [Heart Disease](#)
- [Diabetes](#)

[See all learning centers >](#)

flu vaccine **FINDER**

Find flu vaccination locations by ZIP code or by city and state. Your results will appear on a map on Google's website. [Go](#)

health **TOOLS**



[Symptom Checker](#)



[Health Encyclopedia](#)



Drug Interaction Checker

[See all health tools »](#)

most popular ARTICLES

Viewed

1. A New, Stronger Flu Shot Just for People Age 65-Plus
2. Get Back to Sleep
3. What Your Hair May Say About Your Heart
4. The New Flu Shot for Older Americans: Answers to Your Questions
5. Vitamin D Deficiency Linked to Dementia
6. From Sick to Old
7. Older Adults Increasingly Use Medical Marijuana for Nausea, Pain
8. Become an Oregon Long-Term Care Ombudsman or Get Help From One
9. Sleep on This
10. Older Veterans With Post-Traumatic Stress May Face Greater Risk of Dementia

Recommended

Commented

One reason researchers don't know more about marijuana's potential benefits today is that the federal Controlled Substances Act still classifies marijuana as a Schedule I drug, a category reserved for dangerous drugs with a high potential for abuse and "no currently accepted medical use."

Many researchers dispute both parts of that description. There's growing evidence for medical uses of the weed, they insist. "And when people use it medicinally, there's very little reason to think it leads to abuse," says Yazulla. "No one has ever died from using marijuana, as far as we know."

But as long as marijuana remains a Schedule I drug, researchers face enormous hurdles in winning approval to conduct research. "It's a real catch-22," says Diane Hoffmann, an expert on medical marijuana laws at the University of Maryland School of Law in Baltimore. "Because marijuana is a Schedule I drug, it's very difficult to do the research required to move it to Schedule II."

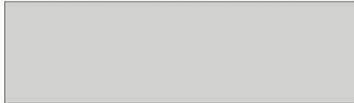
Conflicting state and federal laws, meanwhile, have created a legal landscape fraught with uncertainties. Despite laws in some states making medicinal marijuana legal, cultivating and using marijuana remains a federal offense. In 2009, the Justice Department announced that federal resources would not be used to enforce the law against medicinal marijuana. "But that's a matter of enforcement," says Hoffmann. "It doesn't change the law." The federal government can always reverse course and begin cracking down, she points out, even in states that have legalized marijuana.

«Previous 1 2 3 Next »

Share | Print

tell us what YOU THINK

You must be signed in to comment. [Sign In](#) | [Register](#)



DavidBriggs
5:44 PM ON NOVEMBER 3, 2010
This is a fantastic article.

I am so glad that people have opened their minds and begun moving beyond the lies propagated by Anslinger. I hope to see more articles on medical marijuana and the medicinal efficacy of cannabis.

Report Abuse



mailman451
6:30 PM ON NOVEMBER 1, 2010
Why don't they leave us with the constitutional right of pursuit of happiness?

Report Abuse



slick9
3:52 PM ON NOVEMBER 1, 2010
It's great to see so many comments supporting the legalization of medical marijuana. To ban it is just plain cruel to people in pain. And as many users have testified, marijuana is more effective and less debilitating than expensive prescription painkillers (which can be equally if not more addictive than marijuana used for medical reasons). Good for the AARP Bulletin for illuminating this controversial issue with actual facts and the experiences of real people.

Report Abuse

[More comments »](#)

POWERED BY PLUCK



[Sitemap](#) [Experts](#) [Blogs](#) [Tools](#) [Newsstand](#) [Mobile](#) [RSS](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Share](#)

about AARP

We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50 and over improve the quality of their lives.

- About Us
- Contact Us
- Our Events
- Careers
- En Español
- AARP Foundation
- AARP International
- NRTA
- Research
- Public Policy Institute
- Surveys and Statistics
- Diversity

- INITIATIVES
 - Government Watch
 - Black Community
 - Create The Good
 - LifeTuner
- PROGRAMS
 - AARP Tax-Aide
 - Driver Safety
 - AARP Work/Search
 - Employer Resources
- PRESS & MEDIA
 - Press Center
 - Advertise with Us

where AARP STANDS

- POLICY
 - AARP: COLA Critical to Millions of Americans
 - [Read](#)
- RESEARCH
 - Social Media and Technology Use Among Adults 50+
 - [Read](#)
- TAKE ACTION
 - Our Fight: Keeping Social Security Strong
 - [Read](#)

aarp in YOUR STATE [See another state](#)

Learn about day-to-day news, events & opportunities with AARP in your state. [Register](#)

