

Cannabis and Sleep

It is estimated that up to 40% of the adult population suffers from some type of sleep disorder and many individuals have turned to cannabis for the treatment of their insomnia. Most research about cannabis for sleep disorders focuses on THC due to its known sedating qualities. Several studies have shown that THC can be effective in inducing and/or maintaining sleep and one study using synthetic THC (Dronabinol), showed improved sleep parameters in individuals with moderate or severe sleep apnea¹⁻⁴. Another review has shown that CBD can be effective for treating insomnia and REM sleep disorders⁵. It is thought that cannabinoids help with sleep disorders by binding to cannabinoid receptors in the brain which increase levels of a sleep-promoting chemical called adenosine and by suppressing the brain's arousal system.

Due to its rapid onset and short duration, smoked or vaporized cannabis can help induce but does not generally help to maintain sleep. Maintenance of sleep is better accomplished with the use of cannabis tinctures or edibles given their longer duration of action (6-8 hours). Because oral cannabis (edibles) can take 30-60 minutes to work and don't reach peak for 2 hours or more, it is best to take an edible at least 1 hour before bed. Because of its psychoactive properties, some patients experience vivid or disturbing dreams when using THC for insomnia. As it does not suppress respiration, even at higher doses, there is no danger in combining cannabis with other sedatives.



To induce and maintain sleep, higher doses of CBD are often required. Some patients have reported that minor cannabinoids such as CBN or terpenes such as Myrcene or Linalool can be helpful for sleep, but clinical trials are lacking, and effective doses are not well established.

Many people have disturbed sleep due to pain and, because of its pain-relieving properties, cannabis may help with sleep for this reason as well.

Using cannabinoids for sleep can be complicated and it is recommended that an individual consult with a cannabis-literate clinician to help with dosing and to ensure that cannabis is used safely and effectively.

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