



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

## Mastering the Challenges of Hemp Oil Therapy

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It is likely that many of your patients are using or have seriously considered using products made from *cannabis sativa*—CBD oil (hemp oil) or marijuana—to help alleviate their painful symptoms. Hemp oil, administered orally, is highly complementary to acupuncture. Its main ingredient cannabidiol (CBD), one of more than 85 cannabinoids contained within the cannabis plant, has been shown to be beneficial in models of pain and inflammation. Human studies also corroborate that it is beneficial in depression and anxiety.

### Hemp Oil Properties

Unlike marijuana, hemp oil has a negligible concentration of the psychoactive component tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the most abundant cannabinoid in marijuana.

In my own clinical practice as a naturopathic doctor, I have used hemp oil successfully in patients who are experiencing physical discomfort as well as those with depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It has been interesting to see the researched benefits play out in clinical practice.

However, many clinicians including acupuncturists may not be familiar with the nuances of using hemp oil. For example, what is the proper dosage for patients experiencing pain or anxiety? How can it be incorporated into dietary supplement regimens you are already prescribing? What are some of the safest and most effective brands? How does hemp oil's effects on the body differ from that of marijuana? Are there any contraindications?

Now a new certification program can help acupuncturists and other health care practitioners safely and effectively use hemp oil in clinical practice. I'll discuss more about that certification program in a minute. First, it's important to understand why hemp oil can be effective in pain management and in reducing inflammation. Its mechanism of action is an important reason why you might consider using it in clinical practice and becoming certified in its use. Its mechanism involves the endocannabinoid system. Here's an introduction (or for some of you a refresher course) on the

endocannabinoid system and how it relates to the body's control of pain and inflammation.



### The Body's Natural Pain Management System

The endocannabinoid system is an endogenous system in the body for modulating inflammation and pain. This system is made up of lipid mediators known as endocannabinoids, which act on the cannabinoid-1 (CB1) and cannabinoid-2 (CB2) receptors. CB1 is primarily expressed in the brain, although it is found in other areas of the body. CB2, meanwhile, is found mostly outside the brain, especially immune cells.

We all have endogenous endocannabinoids that act on these receptors. But the components of cannabis act on them as well. THC, the psychoactive component of cannabis, interacts with CB1 receptors. The CBD in hemp oil activates CB2 receptors. Evidence indicates that both receptors are involved in pain management, and CB2 in particular also exerts anti-inflammatory effects.

Many human studies have investigated the effects of combined use of THC/CBD in pain management. However, there is indication that CBD alone can be useful in this regard by acting not only on CB2, but also other endocannabinoid receptors involved in pain control.

There's also a lot of interesting evidence in both humans and animals to show that CBD has a calming effect and can reduce anxiety. Furthermore, a number of studies have found CBD can mitigate depression. It reduces the decline in hippocampal neurogenesis and dendrite spines density caused by chronic stress. These two changes in the brain are linked to the damaging effects of stress on mental health, and CBD's ability to inhibit these stress-induced changes may in part account for its ability to support mental health. Since a lot of acupuncture patients who are suffering from pain also experience depression and anxiety, this adds even more clinical relevance to the use of hemp oil.

### New Cannabinoid Certification Program

With a legal environment favorable to its use, hemp oil has become a more acknowledged therapeutic. However, the busy acupuncturist needs a solid scientific and clinically relevant understanding of how to employ hemp with various health conditions. Consequently, the International Center for Cannabis Therapy (ICCT), a partnership of qualified doctors and scientists that specialize in the medical application of cannabis, has introduced a new online certification program for health care practitioners. The eight certification modules are based on a decade of research conducted by more than 70 scientists as well as my experience as a clinician using hemp oil in my practice.

Highlights of the certification program include:

- Incorporating cannabinoids into a medical practice safely, effectively, and legally.
- Proper dosing based on researched and proven protocols.
- How to be certain of the cannabinoid content in the CBD/cannabis oil recommended for patients.
- Examination of the current clinical literature supporting hemp's use in conditions related to immunity, autoimmunity, inflammation, insomnia, anxiety, PTSD, etc.

One of the modules will also discuss clinical cases and give participants a better grasp of the regulatory freedom to flex your ability to help patients with hemp therapeutics. Participants in the online certification program will walk away with important evidence-based skills on using hemp oil in clinical practice.

The online certification program includes an additional marketing module offering instruction on how to market your ICCT certification and newly acquired knowledge of hemp to patients and to the community to assist with building your practice. This instruction is conducted by Marketing Unlimited, a firm with 27 years' experience in the natural products industry.

Clearly, hemp oil has a number of intriguing applications in clinical practice. However, properly implementing its safe and effective use requires a strong knowledge base. Participating in the ICCT certification program will provide the necessary skills.

### *References*

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