



HERBAL MEDICINE

## CBD & Chinese Medicine

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Whole-plant hemp CBD oil products are becoming increasingly available, and many of our patients, friends and family are enjoying the multitude of positive health benefits inherent in hemp CBD. As a practicing Chinese medicine herbalist and educator I have combined my clinical observation with known research into the actions of hemp CBD oil, and the endocannabinoid system, to provide an understanding of both through the Chinese herbal medicine framework.

### Whole-Plant Industrial Hemp CBD Oil Tincture

The oil extracted from the industrial hemp plant is a viscous medium that is typically delivered in a carrier oil such as hemp seed oil. Some companies prefer to use other carrier oils like olive oil, coconut oil, MCT oil, or sesame oil. This description is referring to hemp CBD oil containing less than .03 percent tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), in hemp seed oil at a ratio of 50 mg active ingredient per ml.



In this form the oil has a distinctive bitter, earthy, almost sweet taste, and unlike many substances that are bitter, is neutral in temperature. Combining the taste characteristics of the oil and the known therapeutic benefits of hemp CBD oil, we can safely say it enters the Heart, Liver and Spleen channels.

Research on the therapeutic benefits of hemp CBD oil is growing, with recent studies showing that it benefits conditions such as: ADHD, addiction, anxiety and stress, depression and mood disorders, inflammatory bowel disorders, insomnia, migraine headaches, pain disorders including arthritis, post-traumatic stress disorder, seizure disorders and other neurologic disorders including Alzheimer's, dementia and Parkinson's, and a wide range of skin conditions.

With this information, and clinical observations of whole-plant hemp CBD oil's therapeutic effectiveness, it can be said from a Chinese herbal medicine perspective it has the following actions:

- Calms and soothes the spirit (Shen)
- Settles the ethereal soul (Hun)
- Regulates Heart and Liver qi, moves qi
- Consolidates Heart and Spleen qi
- Nourishes yin and blood
- Clears heat

To fully understand the actions of the oil and its clinical effectiveness, it is necessary to understand the endocannabinoid system and how it can be viewed through the Chinese herbal medicine theoretical framework.

#### The Endocannabinoid System & Chinese Herbal Medicine

Much has been researched and written about the endocannabinoid system and its role in

maintaining health, restoring health, and regulating the body as a whole. Currently we know that it consists of two receptors - CB1 and CB2 and their signaling molecules, arachidonoyl ethanolamide (AEA or anandamide) and 2-arachidonoyl glycerol (2-AG).

While both CB1 and CB2 receptors are found throughout the body, CB1 receptors are most prolific within the brain, and CB2 receptors are mostly found in the peripheral body, especially within the digestive tract and immune system. Generally, working together in a complementary fashion, the CB1 and CB2 receptors also have some opposing actions, becoming apparent in disease processes rather than healthy states.

The overall, encompassing function of the endocannabinoid system is to regulate energy, pleasure, and well-being, which in Chinese medicine terms points directly to the function of the Heart and its role as the sovereign ruler of the body as a whole. Additionally, if we consider the pronounced action on both the brain and the body, we can safely put forth that the endocannabinoid system resides within the realm of the Heart in Chinese medicine theory.

Looking closer at the actions of the endocannabinoid system we continue to see strong correlations of its actions and the role of qi, blood, body fluids, yin and yang within the body. In a general sense the actions of CB1 and CB2 receptors and their signaling molecules maintain health and will bring the body back into to a healthy or balanced state when injury occurs or disease develops. In Chinese herbal medicine we attribute that function to the Harmonizing treatment method within the traditional Eight Treatment Methods employed when using Chinese herbal formulas.

### Finding Harmony

The harmonizing method is known to bring the body back into balance by harmonizing the organs and substances, and resolving lingering pathogenic factors. This method is somewhat down-played for its effectiveness, however, the benefit of the harmonizing method is that it allows the body to heal itself. By rebalancing negative energies and processes, the body's organs and systems that maintain health and prevent disease can work to their highest capacity.

Research has shown that the endocannabinoid system is very much an "on demand" system, becoming active when it is needed and quickly disappearing when its function is complete. In doing so it effectively controls pain, inflammation, disease processes, energy, and overall health. This speaks to the role of all aspects of qi (upright qi, source qi, protective qi, etc.), its strength, flow, and ability to regulate the body's response to pathogenic influences. Qi is always present but the role and function it needs to fulfill at any given moment changes continually.

For example, with exposure to a pathogenic factor like wind heat, the protective (wei) qi, with support of nutritive (ying) qi and upright (zheng) qi is activated to protect the body from possible penetration and development of a cold or flu. Conversely, with athletic pursuits like running, the qi of the Heart, Lung, Spleen and Liver is activated to produce energy, regulate breathing, and protect against injury. When either situation is complete, the activated qi remains present but no longer "active." The same concept can be applied to any situation in which our body is called upon to maintain balance, engage in a task or activity, protect against disease, and heal injuries and disease processes.

*Editor's Note:* The second part of this article will cover clinical observations, as well as contraindications.

### Resources

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