



PATIENT EDUCATION

## The Effects of Cannabis: A Look at the Body

Doug Eisenstark, LAc

Marijuana and cannabis use has moved from an illicit and controversial substance to a widespread legal, social and commercial commodity. Certainly as a recreational drug it's one of the safest and its use and that of CBD have the potential for new possibilities in medical care. What was once underground is now the subject of studies, articles and scientific experiments.

However, because marijuana affects consciousness we have to look at both the zang-fu organs and the wider spirit implications. Although both Hammer and Zalk in their *Acupuncture Today* articles<sup>1-2</sup> detailed the organs involved in marijuana use we can pinpoint a missing component to the discussion. While we can see liver qi, kidney and certainly aspects of shen in marijuana (as most consciousness changing drugs) one needs to consider also the hun and po and subsequently the Shao Yang, the Gall Bladder and San Jiao (Triple Burner).

### The Gall Bladder & Cannabis

As the organ of judgement, the Gall Bladder is seen as the impartial judge of the emotional landscape of the body. Freed from this impartial judgement much of the enjoyment of marijuana is the uninhibited thought that it allows. The surface of the banal appears absurdly funny, the most unoriginal music reveals itself as profound and everyday words take on great meaning. Associations between random sensory events and thought are surprising and often amusing. Among a group of friends, the sharing of a joke or experience creates bonding. At an ever larger scale, marijuana has created a parallel culture of like minded persons and associations.



The hun is associated with abstract thought, concepts and ideas. Rochat de La Valle writes: "The hun may go on what is called 'the wandering of the souls', or 'the ecstatic journey', which is a spiritual journey where the hun leave the body of the adept." In one way the hun can be seen as linked to "collective consciousness" or a society's (culture or subcultural) underlying shared beliefs. For artists this uninhibited state is a treasure of free creation. Insights can be gathered from innumerable sources that find resonance with other people.

#### Exploring Hun & Po

The "successful" artist then is the one who can tap into the hun and transmit ideas that are shared by many others. It is the large "mind" which is captivating about the hun. Yet even the best ideas an artist may have they still must put forward the concepts out to the world in one way or another. The extreme modern archetypal "hun" person can be seen as the "couch potato" with big ideas but not the or po spirit qi to put anything forward. No matter how great the thoughts they may think they have their ideas only live "in their heads" and never materialize in the world.

The po is most associated with the body even while the po does not want to be aware of the body. It craves movement in the material world and its clearest expression is in "the Zone" of a long distance runner. Body discomfort disturbs the po while the hun is most afraid of boredom. We can say that the writer needs the hun to think of great ideas but it takes the po to actually sit down and type the words out. Although there are certainly those who can motivate themselves under the influence of marijuana, its abuse and overuse is also notorious for creating the chronic abstract and apathetic thinker.

From Fundamentals of Chinese Medicine (PMPH): "The liver is compared to an army general who

governs the design of strategy, while the gallbladder is compared to an impartial judge of justice who governs decision-making. The designing of strategy is a process of planning and considering the future, a precondition to decision-making, while a decision is the final judgment to be implemented...In addition, the governance of decision-making by the gallbladder also concerns bravery. A person with sufficient gallbladder qi is fearless and able to maintain a calm state of mind in the face of stressful situations, and thus able to make accurate judgments and choices."<sup>3</sup>

## Cannabis & Chronic Use

The uninhibited judgement of marijuana allows unfiltered creative thought. Good artistic insights from one person can clearly resonate simultaneously with many people. Unfortunately marijuana (as does most drug use) also has the effect of not allowing one to have judgement about one's judgement. This can lead to thought that may seem profound at the time but less so with the feet back on the ground. Overuse then distorts the clear judgement of the Gall Bladder.

Marijuana can disinhibit liver qi stagnation but also in chronic use dissipate liver yin. The spirit finds it harder to be "held" in the blood and depends too increasingly on the yang of marijuana to activate the spirit. For the chronic user, time away from the high is flat and only re-use excites the fire of the San Jiao using (and possibly using up) the yuan qi coming from kidneys through the San Jiao. If there is any addictive quality to chronic use it is probably in this process.

While recreational and artistic expression through uninhibited judgement may have its rewards, the opposite side of judgement may appear in the form of paranoia. No longer able to distinguish between true inner or outer threat the user can succumb to self generated fears. As an extreme example, a simple cue of a far off police siren can bring terror of imprisonment.

A random and innocent conversation can bring a torrent of thoughts, fantasy or confusion. Because THC stays in the body for weeks after ingesting this last point is to be taken seriously by anyone whose job (such as a medical practitioner) is the discernment of interactive conversation with others. While marijuana may give insight into one's own thinking it is supremely bad at accurately absorbing the meaning and intent of others. It is indeed a bad judge of judgement. Interactions with others can be notoriously "off-base" even as the user thinks they have great insight.

Obviously, there are many aspects of recreational and medicinal uses of marijuana and there are many who find relief from anxiety and pain. Without being judgmental towards the drug nor its users I hope these notes help practitioners understand more of the marijuana physiology in Chinese medical terms.

## References

1. Hammer L. "Marijuana, Apathy and Chinese Medicine, Part 1." *Acupuncture Today*, May 2015.
2. Zalk JR. "Recreational Cannabis Use and TCM." *Acupuncture Today*, Apr 2015.
3. Sun G, et al. *Fundamentals of Chinese Medicine*. Singapore: PMPH, 2014.

JANUARY 2018