

Can medical marijuana or cannabidiol be recommended for treatment of epilepsy? – answer yes

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Despite the introduction of a range of new antiepileptic drugs possessing a variety of novel mechanisms of action, outcomes in the common epilepsies of adolescents and adults have not appreciatively improved over the last 20 years. Cannabis has been used to treat seizures since as early as 1800 BC in Sumeria. Indeed, William Gowers lauded its anticonvulsant properties in his 1881 textbook. Anecdotal reports of cannabidiol's substantial efficacy in a handful of children with Dravet syndrome has triggered a global explosion of interest in cannabis products for the treatment epilepsy. These lipid soluble molecules possess a specific pharmacology by binding to a unique range of receptors in the brain. Synthetic compounds such as cannabidiol and cannabidivarin are largely devoid of psychiatric properties. Preliminary open studies with the former in children and adults with pharmaco-resistant epilepsies are providing promising results with overt benefit and acceptable tolerability. A double-blind placebo controlled randomized trial with cannabidivarin in adults with focal epilepsy is well underway. There is increasing support for the effective and safe use of cannabis derivatives for the treatment of a range of epilepsies in children and adults. In conclusion, medical marijuana or cannabidiol can, indeed, be recommended for the treatment of epilepsy. These compounds represent a major area of drug development. They are, however, at an early stage and much work still requires to be done.