

Bogus 'cure' claims have U.S. consumers snapping up CBD products

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(HealthDay)—CBD has been widely marketed as a cure-all for whatever ails you, and a new study finds many Americans are buying the sales pitch.

Researchers tracking a Reddit forum on CBD found many folks discussing use of cannabidiol to treat conditions for which there are proven, safe and effective medicines and therapies.

Forum participants said they were using CBD for mental and emotional problems, joint pain, sleep disturbances, neurological conditions, gastrointestinal issues and a host of other illnesses, researchers report Oct. 15 in *JAMA Network Open*.

The problem is, there's no evidence that CBD is an effective treatment for these ailments.

"The [U.S. Food and Drug Administration] has only approved CBD for one rare childhood condition for epilepsy," giving its stamp to a CBD medication called Epidiolex, said study co-author Erik

Hendrickson, a research associate at the Center for Data Driven Health at the Qualcomm Institute at the University of California, San Diego. "It hasn't gone under any other scientific scrutiny to see whether it's effective for any other kind of conditions."

But Dr. J. Michael Bostwick, a psychiatrist and researcher at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., doesn't think there is cause for alarm just because people are reaching beyond conventional medicine to treat their health problems.

"This article is a valuable contribution because it simply observes the state of things, but to go a step further and say this is really bad because people aren't doing what doctors want them to do is an opinion, not a fact," said Bostwick, who was not part of the study.

CBD (cannabidiol) is one of major chemical components of marijuana. It does not cause intoxication but has been shown to act upon a network of receptors within the human body, raising hopes that it could provide a natural therapy.

The wave of marijuana legalization in the United States has led to a massive surge of CBD products being marketed across the nation, researchers said.

To gain some insight into how folks are using CBD, researchers reviewed posts on Reddit, a social media website with 330 million active users.

A random sample of 376 posts labeled testimonials found that 90% cited using CBD to treat diagnosable medical conditions.

People most often said they use CBD to treat psychiatric problems such as anxiety, autism or depression. Nearly two-thirds of the testimonials discussed its use for treating mental or [emotional problems](#).

Other conditions for which CBD is being used include orthopedic (26% of testimonials); sleep (15%); neurological (7%); and gastrointestinal (4%).

Testimonials also mentioned its use in treating addiction, heart problems, skin conditions, eye disorders, oral health and sexual dysfunction, researchers reported.

"The public appears to believe CBD is medicine," study co-author Dr. Davey Smith said in a UC San Diego news release. "Who would have predicted that the public might ever think CBD is a cardiology medication?" Smith is chief of infectious diseases and global public health at the university.

Researchers are not just concerned because no studies have been done to prove CBD's effectiveness in treating these health problems, Hendrickson said.

There might be unknown side effects caused by CBD that haven't been detected, or dangerous interactions with other medications the person might be taking, he said.

"This is an unknown territory. Further information is needed," Hendrickson said.

CBD isn't regulated by the FDA, meaning that the purity and dosage of any particular product has not been tested, the researchers added.

CBD's popularity has been fueled by marketing campaigns promoting it as a natural product that contributes to wellness, Hendrickson said.

These marketing efforts have found a receptive audience in folks who simply don't want what modern medicine offers, according to Bostwick.

"There are very many potential patients that do not believe that allopathic [conventional] medicine has what they need," he said. "I think there is a whole cultural phenomenon of people turning to all kinds of foods and herbs and natural products to treat themselves."

Bostwick said the research to test CBD's effectiveness hasn't been done mainly because

marijuana remains illegal at the federal level. But he argues that an absence of such evidence is not the same as proof that CBD is ineffective and potentially harmful.

"If you look at the cannabidiol products and the shops that sell them, they seem to be doing well and there are a lot of people going this path because they're keeping these businesses open," Bostwick said.

Hendrickson urged people who are thinking about using CBD to discuss it with their doctor to learn about other drugs and therapies that are proven effective.

In the meantime, he said more research into CBD is needed, and the FDA needs to step in and better regulate these products.

More information: Harvard Medical School has more about [cannabidiol](#).

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