

Topical Use of Cannabis

Why use topical?

Cannabis has been used historically to treat a variety of ailments by topical application. Topical medicines are absorbed through the skin to affect a targeted area, as a minimally invasive way to administer, and as a way to reduce side effects. Recent research has confirmed that cannabinoids are effective at reducing pain at peripheral sites.(1) Many medical marijuana patients have found benefit from using topically applied cannabis, as a way to minimize its central nervous system and psychoactive effects. Some patients prepare cannabis in alcohol extracts and apply it as a rub to the affected body part. Others use cannabis oils or balms that they procure at dispensaries or privately prepare.

The skin is one of our largest organs and is capable of absorbing medicine, as well as expelling waste. It makes sense to apply a medicine directly to the site of need. The medicine gets absorbed in the area that is most desirable and will have less of a chance to reach areas that are undesirable. Applying a cannabis preparation to the skin does not usually affect brain receptors, and thus has little effect on cognition or memory. It does not produce the “high” effect that has caused so much debate about marijuana as an intoxicant. Skin disorders, in particular, do well with topical cannabis. Eczema, psoriasis, contact dermatitis, pruritis (itching) and even skin infections have been reported to improve with topical cannabis. Marijuana may also be used topically for stopping migraines, headaches or pain.

Cannabis oil has a multitude of uses. It is an excellent pain reliever because it stimulates localized THC and CBD receptors throughout our bodies. It also acts as an anti-inflammatory by stimulating circulation. The massage oil is not only good for a body rub, but has taken pain and swelling away from arthritic joints. Topical alcohol rubs are ideal for arthritic joint pain or sore muscles. Salves may be used anywhere you would use a first-aid ointment. You can use it for cuts and scrapes, infections and dermatitis, eczema, psoriasis and bruises.

Plant Material – Strain

Cannabis Indica, as opposed to Cannabis Sativa, is best for providing relief for physical symptoms. Some benefits of Indica are – to reduce pain, relax muscles, relieve spasms, reduce inflammation, reduce nausea, relieve headaches and migraines, and as an anti-convulsant. The active component in Cannabis that is medicinally preferable for use in a topical is a cannabinoid called CBD (cannabidiol). Unlike THC(delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol), CBD does not induce euphoria, but does have anti-inflammatory, anti-convulsant, anti-psychotic, anti-oxidant, analgesic and neuroprotective properties.(2) Cannabis Indica tends to have a higher concentration of CBD than Cannabis Sativa. There has been a resurgence of interest in high CBD containing strains recognizing that these are preferable for many medicinal uses. Now there are several strains available that have a much higher percentage of CBD.(3) Strain selection allows you to regulate the amount of THC versus CBD, and select the effect you want to obtain.

Recipes:

Topical Cannabis Alcohol

Fill a pint sized mason jar 25% full with dry crushed cannabis. (Most recipes use one part cannabis to 3-4 parts alcohol). Fill to top with alcohol (rubbing alcohol works fine.) Let stand for 2 to 4 weeks in a cool, dark place, shaking occasionally. Strain. Stronger preparations are made by repeating the process. Store in a dark bottle.

Topical Cannabis Oil

Use dry crushed cannabis. Add oil (such as hemp oil, or olive oil) so that the plant material is covered with the oil. Keep in a dark cool place for 3 weeks. Shake daily. Filter using a sieve.

Topical Cannabis Ointment/Lotion

Dry crushed cannabis is heated in a crock pot or over a double boiler for 45 to 60 minutes with a thick oil or fat, such as olive oil or cocoa butter. Store in a bottle or jar in a cool, dark place for 2-3 months. Filter using a cheese cloth. Reheat with beeswax to thicken for an ointment. Add aloe vera gel to make a lotion.

Topical Cannabis Salve

Add beeswax to cannabis infused oil and heat it until all the wax is melted. To test to see if your salve is hard enough, put some on a spoon and set it in a cool place for a few minutes. One pint of oil will need about 1 1/2 ounces of beeswax (5 teaspoons of beeswax are in an ounce).

References:

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