Taking a Look at Cannabidiol (CBD Oil) as a Natural Treatment for RA

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CBD Oil for Rheumatoid Arthritis

In recent years, alternative medicine has become more mainstream in helping to treat everything from mild ailments to chronic health conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA). One of the most controversial yet promising alternative treatments is cannabidiol oil, also known as CBD oil. CBD is sourced from the cannabis plant and is a natural active compound that is not intoxicating. So, how does CBD oil for rheumatoid arthritis work?

Treating RA with CBD

For rheumatoid arthritis patients not looking for the high that can occur from THC (the active compound found in medical marijuana that produces psychoactive effects), CBD can be the next best option. While it may cause some drowsiness, the CBD is extracted from a certain variety of cannabis called hemp that decreases the amount of THC significantly (up to 0.3 %).

For example, in the U.S., CBD oil must contain less than 0.3% THC to be considered federally legal and not a controlled substance. Other countries in the world have either not legalized any form of cannabis use or use different standards of safety and effectiveness.

Before entering the spotlight in the last two decades as a possible treatment for plan for inflammation, anxiety and sleep disorders, CBD has first appeared to be used in medicine dating back to 5,000 years. In this article we look at the benefits of CBD oil for rheumatoid arthritis that have been discovered to date, how it can help your RA symptoms, its side effects and risks, and how to talk to your doctor about this treatment option.

Benefits of CBD Oil for RA

The majority of patients who have tried CBD have reported noticeable pain and inflammation relief, sleep improvement and decreased anxiety. However, the answer as to whether CBD works for arthritis is still up for debate, mainly because there have not been quality studies done in humans that can validate its effectiveness. Only animals and a small fraction of human-based studies on patients living with rheumatoid arthritis have been completed.

One study, done in 2006, was the first controlled trial where researchers evaluated the use of a cannabis-type of medicine to treat RA. This medication, called Sativex, reduced inflammation and improved pain after five weeks of use. Other studies done on animals and humans have found equal results in terms of reducing joint pain, inflammation and improving sleep without any negative side effects.

How Does CBD Oil Help?

So, now that we know what symptoms CBD helps with, it would be beneficial to understand how it actually helps.

Topical CBD Treatment

CBD products can be applied topically on the skin, ingested orally or inhaled. Lotions, balms and salves tend to be the first options people try who are new to CBD, but who also want a more targeted treatment approach for joints, muscles and surrounding tissues.

Digestible Capsules

The second option goes directly into the digestive tract whether by food, liquid tinctures, or capsules. This is where dosages and monitoring come into play with a trained medical professional to monitor any effects. Typically, it can take anywhere from 15 minutes to 45 minutes (sometimes up to an hour) to feel any benefit with this method.

Using a Vape

The third is inhaling CBD through a vape pen. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has warned patients against this option as it has been shown to lead to lung issues, hospitalizations and widespread deaths. Rheumatoid arthritis already impacts the organs, with the lungs being the main target. Inflammation, nodules, airway obstruction and scarring of the lungs have been reported in RA patients. Rheumatologists and medical professionals often warn against smoking cigarettes and often tell a patient to stop smoking indefinitely - with CBD this is no different.

How Does CBD Affect the Brain?

No matter how CBD is used, it impacts the brain differently than medical marijuana. Since CBD has very little THC, it skips any psychoactive effects in a patient and instead interacts quickly with two main brain receptors responsible for pain and the immune system.

These brain receptors, CB1 and CB2, when targeted with CBD help reduce the pain and inflammation that is seen so commonly in RA patients. CB2 is one receptor that works closely with the immune system. The anti-inflammatory properties found in CBD oil may also help slow or stop the progression of joint damage, which can cause mild, moderate, or severe pain. Researchers believe that the connection between CB2 and the immune system can be a promising discovery in the treatment of RA overall.

What Are the Side Effects and Risks?

Natural and alternative medicine does not mean there are no side effects and risks. As with conventional medication, patients need to make sure they are being monitored by a qualified health care professional and report any unwanted symptoms.

The good news is that no serious side effects have been reported, but some patients may experience mild side effects. Nausea, diarrhea, appetite changes and fatigue can occur when beginning any kind of CBD treatment. Certain disease-modifying drugs used to help treat rheumatoid arthritis may increase your risk of side effects if they are found to interact with CBD oil. Although, this area needs to be further studied to understand the impact on combining the two for a patient’s treatment plan.

According to the Arthritis Foundation, if you are taking any of the following to treat RA, it would be advisable to talk to your doctor before starting any form of CBD treatment:

- Corticosteroids
- Certain antidepressants
- Certain fibromyalgia medications

Whether you apply it topically or internally, it is important to note that it still enters the bloodstream. The patient’s medical history and personal preference need to be in mind when choosing the right form of CBD oil. Once you

pick an option that works well for your medical needs and lifestyle, your doctor can help pick the right dosage and reputable source for you.

Check with Your Doctor

The only drawback is that CBD has not been studied effectively with enough clinical trials looking solely at its effects on arthritis. With that being said, it is important to let your doctor know of all supplements and medications you are on. There should be no reason to forgo your prescribed treatment plan in the hopes CBD oil will do the job.

This is not only dangerous but can accelerate the disease process and further your risk for joint damage. If your goal is to ween off medication while using CBD, then your qualified medical professional can help you do that. Many patients have been able to successfully lower their medication dosages after adding cannabis into their treatment regime. Alternative medicine is just as much of a trial and error process as conventional medicine. It’s about finding what works for you to achieve balance and overall wellness.

If you would like to learn more about natural treatment options for RA, check out our posts on anti-inflammatory foods to include in your diet, herbs for RA and natural remedies for rheumatoid arthritis numbness and tingling.