

Forget the 'lazy stoner': Marijuana users don't exercise any less

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(HealthDay)—The stereotypical image of pot smokers has long been one of "stoners" parked on the couch, surrounded by snacks and glued to the television, but a new study dispels that notion.

Instead, people who use marijuana may [exercise](#) just as much as other people do, and perhaps even a little more, researchers report.

Considering how important regular exercise is to one's overall health, the finding could dissipate some of the health concerns surrounding the drug, the study authors said.

For the study, researchers from the University of Miami's Herbert Business School and the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., analyzed data from a national health survey that has followed over 20,000 people, starting in their teenage years, from 1994 through 2018.

The study looked at two different times in these peoples' lives—when they were aged 24 to 34, and

34 to 42—and compared their exercise patterns (if they exercised in the past seven days, and the number of days and type of exercise they did on those days) to whether or not they used marijuana (and if so, how often).

Overall, the results revealed that [marijuana users](#) were no more or less likely to be active, and some measures even suggested that marijuana users exercised more than non-users.

"In the vast majority of models, there was no [significant relationship](#) between any of our marijuana use measures and any of our exercise measures," said lead study author Michael French. He's a professor in the department of health management and policy at Miami Herbert Business School, in Coral Gables, Fla.

"The takeaway from this is that the concerns about marijuana users being lazy and not being active and not engaging in sports, it just didn't show up in this data," French said.

On the other hand, a few of the researchers' models did turn up a surprising link between exercise and marijuana: Users may be *more* likely to exercise in some cases.

"We were curious about the results," French said. "Going into it, we thought, if anything, there would be some negative relationships depending upon how much marijuana you consume. We thought that it is pretty likely that heavy marijuana users were going to be significantly less likely to exercise and significantly less likely to exercise frequently. But that didn't come out, even for heavy users."

The finding that marijuana use doesn't seem to affect one's activity levels and may be associated with higher levels of exercise is novel because it goes against some existing—albeit limited—research in this area.

However, it does line up with Angela Bryan's research. Bryan is a professor of social psychology and neuroscience at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Bryan, who does a lot of work in the realm of exercise, diet and obesity, started studying cannabis because she wondered if legalization and increased access to the drug had the potential to put people at greater risk of obesity.

"I got interested in the connection between [cannabis use](#) and exercise because as legalization happens, you worry if it's true that cannabis makes people unmotivated," Bryan said. "So we went into it thinking that there would be this harmful effect of cannabis on exercise. And that doesn't seem to be what we find at all."

In one study, Bryan and her colleagues surveyed over 600 adult cannabis users who live in states where the drug is legal and found that just over 80% of them endorsed the use of marijuana either before, during or after exercise. Interestingly, those who exercised and used marijuana together spent more time exercising than those who used marijuana separately from exercise.

"We found a really surprising number of cannabis users who are actually meeting physical activity guidelines," Bryan said. "That is higher than what we typically find among non-users. In our data, it seems like the relationship is potentially positive, and there doesn't seem to be a whole lot of negative impacts of cannabis on exercise."

This may not be surprising to people who see [professional athletes](#) like Rob Gronkowski partnering with a cannabidiol (CBD) company after he retired from the New England Patriots and before he joined the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Professional sports leagues are slowly catching on, with the National Football League (NFL) changing its policy to stop suspending players who test positive for marijuana (although players still can be fined and are mandated to participate in treatment). Similarly, Major League Baseball took marijuana off the list of "drugs of abuse" in 2019 and is now treating marijuana use similarly to alcohol use, according to *CNN*.

Anecdotes like this suggest that for some people—including athletes at the highest levels of their profession—marijuana and marijuana-based compounds like CBD can be a part of an active lifestyle.

According to Bryan's research, some people who combine marijuana use and exercise may be doing it because it enhances their enjoyment of exercise. "So it doesn't make you faster, stronger, better, any of those kinds of things. It's more about making it more pleasant," Bryan said. Unsurprisingly, people who enjoy exercise are likely to exercise more, she added.

Other reasons people may turn to marijuana as part of their exercise routine include calming anxiety, improving sleep and recovery, and relieving pain, but the evidence is mixed.

A lot of what is known about this subject is based on word-of-mouth anecdotes. Since publishing this latest research recently in the journal *Preventive Medicine*, French has encountered a lot of these types of accounts. When presenting his research at conferences, he heard from many people who use marijuana as part of their exercise and recovery routine. "Some long-distance runners tend to use it to quiet the mind when they're running," he noted.

At the core of any conversation about the potential risks and benefits of marijuana is that the science has not caught up with the changes surrounding legalization. In other words, marijuana has become more accessible, but there isn't enough scientific evidence and understanding to broadly advise people on how to safely and effectively use it.

Although French and his colleagues' study is not a controlled clinical trial that analyzes how marijuana affects the body during exercise, it does contribute to knowledge of the potential public health impacts of marijuana use.

"Certainly, the image of a [marijuana](#) user just sitting on the couch, watching movies, eating popcorn is not accurate," French said. "There are some of those perhaps, but that's not born out in this research."

More information: Visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more on the [health effects of marijuana use](#).

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