

Raw Cannabis – Medicine Without the High

Cannabis in its raw state provides a “super-green” food, high in chlorophyll, giving our cells oxygen, antioxidants, and medicinal cannabinoids. In addition, the vitamin/mineral content of the plant is most highly preserved in its raw state. It is a difficult plant to eat raw, due to the stalactites (tiny hairs on the stem) that may irritate the mouth, throat, and stomach. The flowering tips, more concentrated in the cannabinoids, are usually full of a sticky resin which sticks to your mouth if you try to chew it and may taste bitter. One can avoid these problems by taking only tender young leaves, or juicing the leaves and buds.

Raw cannabis as a medicine has rarely been studied, mostly because it has a low content of THC, the chemical in cannabis that causes the psychoactive effect. So, if not to “get high”, why would anyone want to deal with the discomfort of eating prickly sticky plant matter, needing a significant fresh plant supply, and possible ingestion of mold or other contaminants in order to use it raw? It turns out that in California, due to the liberal growing allowances in some parts of the state, enough patients have been able to experiment with raw cannabis to rediscover its remarkable medicinal properties. I met such a patient this past year, who presented at the International Cannabinoid Research Society Conference. She has had multiple serious chronic diseases, all improved to the most remarkable extent that I have ever seen in my experience with over 10,000 medical marijuana patients. When I asked her to what she attributes her success, she replied, “Using raw cannabis.” (See Kristen’s Story in this newsletter). Kristen was treated by Dr. William Courtney in Mendocino, CA, who is at the forefront of the use of raw cannabis as medicine. An increasing number of medical marijuana patients in Humboldt and Mendocino are exploring juicing the raw leaf. A dispensary in Arcata has given out juicers to some patients, provided free raw leaf, and is gathering data on its effects.

Fresh green raw leaf should be used, taken right off the plant, not dried or heated in any way. If you dry the leaf/bud, it’s not really raw, and its chemical composition changes. Dr. Courtney advises the use of large shade leaves, or fan leaves picked from a plant that is 3 months of age. The leaves should be soaked in water for 5 minutes before juicing. 8-10 leaves a day is one dose for one person. Most mix it with other juices to improve the flavor or add some raw honey. Split the juice into 5 parts for 5 doses per day. A recent Washington Post interview with Dr. Courtney comments, “Maybe nowhere else in the country could a pot doc advise growing 40 plants -- enough for one juicing each day on the 45-day cycle required of the auto-flowering strain. Not only is it possible here, but a striking number of patients truly do not want to get high.”(1)

It is currently thought that raw cannabis has medicinal activity due to the presence of cannabinoid-acids. All natural cannabinoids (such as THC and CBD) come from precursor carboxylic acids. This carboxyl group is unstable; heat, light, or alkaline pH make it evaporate as CO₂, resulting in the more well researched cannabinoids. Even just drying for a while causes these precursors to break down. THC-Acid is not psychoactive, and accounts for almost all of the cannabinoid content in the raw plant. We don’t yet know what part of the medicinal properties of raw cannabis is due to these acids, what part is due to the nutrition in the raw food, and what part relates to the detoxification process that accompanies the inclusion of raw juice in one’s diet. The action of cannabinoid acids is currently being researched. (2)

Raw cannabis may be a good way to try your medicine during these warm summer months. For more ways to prepare it, see www.cannabis.uk.net/raw%20cannabis/RAW%20CANNABIS.htm.

References

- 1) Vick, Karl, Form of medical marijuana won't get you high, but it's creating a buzz, Washington Post, Jun 1, 2010, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/.../AR2010053103231.html
- 2) Verhoeckx, Kitty C.M. *et al.*, Unheated Cannabis sativa extracts and its major compound THC-acid have potential immuno-modulating properties not mediated by CB1 and CB2 receptor coupled pathways. *International Immunopharmacology*, 6 (2006) 656– 665.