

Cannabis for Chronic Pain: Surveillance – January 2023

Objective and Search Period

This document is based on the 2023 update of a living systematic evidence report, Living Systematic Review on Cannabis and Other Plant-Based Treatments for Chronic Pain, by the Evidence-based Practice Center Program at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).¹

The review authors sought to identify new eligible controlled clinical trials and observational studies with comparator groups examining the treatment of chronic pain with cannabis. The authors also expanded the population inclusion criteria since the last search to include adolescents and those with subacute pain (defined as pain for four to 12 weeks duration). The search was updated from **October 2022 through January 2023**.

Surveillance Update

The review authors found one new eligible randomized controlled trial during the surveillance period. The study compared oral dronabinol (synthetic oral THC [high THC to CBD ratio]), CBD, or combined THC/CBD (low THC to CBD ratio) versus placebo for chronic neuropathic pain.² Combining the results for high THC to CBD ratio and synthetic THC compared to placebo lowered the pooled effect size for improvement in pain severity, rendering the effect small where it was previously moderate. In the same comparison, the review authors also downgraded the SOE for experiencing pain response from moderate to insufficient after combining results of the new study. It was unclear whether the oral CBD administered to the low THC to CBD ratio group was synthetic or plant-based, therefore it was considered separately from the previous study of synthetic CBD, and the SOE was insufficient for that comparison to placebo. Harms data were unchanged.

See the [updated report](#) for more details.

References

1. Chou R, Ahmed AY, Bougatsos C, Morasco BJ, Dana T, Gilbreath T, Fu R. Living Systematic Review on Cannabis and Other Plant-Based Treatments for Chronic Pain: 2022 Update—Surveillance Report 3. (Prepared by the Pacific Northwest Evidence-based Practice Center under Contract No. 75Q80120D00006.) AHRQ Publication No. 23-EHC017. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; April 2023. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23970/AHRQEPCCER250.2022UPDATESR3>. Posted final reports are located on the Effective Health Care Program search page.
2. Zubcevic K, Petersen M, Bach FW, et al. Oral capsules of tetra-hydro-cannabinol (THC), cannabidiol (CBD) and their combination in peripheral neuropathic pain treatment. *Eur J Pain*. Apr 2023;27(4):492-506. doi:10.1002/ejp.2072