# Cannabis May Help Protect the Liver From Alcohol Damage

But experts advise caution, as the drug may worsen other liver diseases, including viral hepatitis.

April 25, 2019 By Casey Halter

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A new study on cannabis and alcohol suggests using both drugs together may have an unexpected health benefit—namely, that using marijuana may help protect the liver from alcohol-related damage, HealthLine reports.

The study, which looked at about 320,000 people with a history of both misusing alcohol and using cannabis, was conducted at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, and aimed to assess the impact of marijuana use and the development of alcoholic liver disease. It was one of the first clinical studies ever conducted on the topic, and researchers were surprised by the findings.

Essentially, study authors found that regular users of both alcohol and marijuana significantly reduced their risk of alcoholic liver disease (ALD), which occurs when the damage from long-term drinking increases fibrosis, or scarring, in the liver, causing inflammation and, eventually, cirrhosis. What's more, the heaviest cannabis consumers benefited the most in the study.

The anti-inflammatory effects of cannabis are well-documented. Previous research has shown that cannabinoid receptors in the liver could be potential targets for treating liver disease. Study authors theorized that cannabis may help reduce the inflammation that occurs early among those with ALD, slowing its progression.

The findings may lead to new cannabis-based treatments for certain liver diseases, say researchers. Study researchers are already working to discover which cannabinoid formulations will provide the most therapeutic benefits.

However, doctors warn that cannabis use may worsen some liver diseases. For example, patients with hepatitis C virus who use cannabis tend to have more liver scarring than those who don't. Doctors also say cannabis may not be good for patients with fatty liver disease.

"You can't just tell the public marijuana is good for your liver because there may also be people whose liver is harmed by it," said Hardeep Singh, MD, a gastroenterologist at St. Joseph Hospital in Orange, California, who commented on the study's findings.

To read the study, click here.

To learn more about cannabis and liver disease, click here.

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