

Cannabis-derived compounds: What you need to know

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Cannabis-derived compounds, such as cannabidiol (CBD), are popping up like weeds (so to speak) in retail and online stores, and are being marketed for a wide range of purported health benefits, most of which are unsubstantiated. Cannabidiol—a chemical component of the *Cannabis sativa* plant (marijuana)—does not produce intoxication or euphoria (ie, the “high”) that comes from delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which is the psychoactive component of marijuana.¹ Cannabidiol has become popular partly due to increased cultural acceptance of marijuana. In a 2019 Pew Research Center survey, 67% of Americans supported marijuana legalization.²

In addition, changing laws have increased the interest in and availability of CBD. The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 legalized hemp, which is defined as cannabis and cannabis-derived compounds with significantly low concentrations of THC (<0.3% on a dry weight basis).^{1,3} However, this act also preserved the FDA’s authority to regulate products containing cannabis and cannabis-derived compounds.¹

With the recent emphasis on CBD, it is easy to forget that the FDA has approved a few medications that are derived from or related to cannabis. In this article, I review the current FDA-approved cannabis-related treatments and their indications, and concerns regarding CBD products.

FDA-approved treatments

To date, the FDA has not approved cannabis for the treatment of any medical or psychiatric condition. However, the FDA has

approved 1 cannabis-derived medication (CBD) and 2 cannabis-related medications (dronabinol and nabilone) for specific indications (these medications are available by prescription only):

Cannabidiol (brand name: Epidiolex) is approved for the treatment of seizures associated with Lennox-Gastaut syndrome or Dravet syndrome in patients age ≥ 2 , and for the treatment of seizures associated with tuberous sclerosis complex in patients age ≥ 1 .^{1,4} There are no other FDA-approved medications that contain CBD.

Dronabinol (brand names: Marinol and Syndros) is an antiemetic agent that contains synthetic THC. It is approved for treating or preventing nausea and vomiting caused by cancer medications and for increasing the appetite of individuals with AIDS.¹

Nabilone (brand name: Cesamet) is a synthetic compound that is structurally similar to THC. It is approved for treating or preventing nausea and vomiting caused by cancer medications.¹

Questionable claims about CBD

Some manufacturers market CBD products as having a variety of health benefits for both humans and pets, but most of these claims are unsubstantiated.¹ The FDA has issued warning letters to several manufacturers who have marketed CBD products as producing therapeutic effects.⁵

Under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, any products intended to have a therapeutic effect are considered drugs, and unapproved drugs cannot be



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