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Cannabis may reduce depression

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THE ARTICLE

Cannabis may reduce depression

The debate over the health benefits and dangers of cannabis, or marijuana, continues with the publication of a study in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* that showed rats given a synthetic cannabis substance were less depressed and anxious. A research team from Canada's University of Saskatchewan observed that a chemical found in cannabis had an antidepressant effect on rats. In the study, the animals were injected with high levels of an artificial substance similar to that found in cannabis, for a month and displayed less anxiety when placed in new environments, a usual trigger of fear for rodents. The team also found that the chemical caused nerve cells to regenerate in the hippocampus area of the rats' brains, which is linked to anxiety and depression.

The research data and findings are being treated with a degree of skepticism from mental health experts, who warn that the laboratory results on rats are unlikely to be replicated in humans. A mountain of previous research has linked cannabis to long-term damage to mental health and an increased susceptibility to anxiety and depression. However, scientists point out that other recreational drugs, such as alcohol and nicotine, perhaps carry more dangers than cannabis. Research indicates that habitual smoking and drinking increases anxiety and depression as well as significantly contributing to an array of other damaging and lethal conditions. Cannabis has been shown to have medicinal properties in relieving symptoms of multiple sclerosis and other pain causing illnesses.

WARM-UPS

1. A RAT'S LIFE: Imagine you are a rat in the laboratory of a university. Walk around the class and talk to the other "rats" about your life. Is it better in the lab than outside in the wild? Are you treated well? What kinds of experiments are you doing? What things make you depressed or anxious?

2. DEPRESSION: Do you ever get depressed? In pairs / groups, talk about how the following things change your feeling or make you depressed. Give examples of how these things make you depressed.

- The weather
- TV news
- Your family
- The earth's environment
- Thinking about your future
- Money
- Your figure / the size of your stomach
- Studying English

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Debate / health benefits / health dangers / cannabis / rats / being depressed / new environments / the brain / mental health / alcohol / cigarettes / pain

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. CANNABIS: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with cannabis or marijuana. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. OPINIONS: In pairs / groups, talk about what you think of these opinions towards cannabis:

a. It's a dangerous drug. It should carry stiff penalties for anyone using it.

b. It's OK for medicinal purposes if prescribed by a doctor.

c. It's less dangerous to our bodies than alcohol and less addictive than nicotine.

d. Many of the politicians who say cannabis is bad use it themselves.

e. If Bill Clinton "experimented" with it, it must be OK.

f. Using cannabis leads to the use of hard drugs like cocaine and heroin.

g. Cannabis is addictive and leads to mental health problems.

h. It's the third most popular recreational drug (behind alcohol and nicotine). People should be allowed to decide if they want to use it.

i. Alcohol makes people violent, cannabis doesn't.

j. Your opinion _____.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

a.	A study has shown that cannabis reduces depression in humans.	T / F
b.	A chemical found in cannabis serves as an antidepressant in rats.	T / F
c.	Tests on rats increased the rodents' fear of new environments.	T / F
d.	The hippocampus area of the brain is linked to a desire for money.	T / F
e.	Mental health experts have warmly welcomed the new findings.	T / F
f.	Mountain cannabis has long-term benefits on recreational activities.	T / F
g.	Cannabis can be less dangerous than alcohol and nicotine.	T / F
h.	Cannabis is effective in relieving symptoms of multiple sclerosis.	T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

a.	debate	worry
b.	synthetic	copied
c.	anxiety	cause
d.	trigger	doubt
e.	regenerate	multitude
f.	skepticism	produce
g.	replicated	characteristics
h.	susceptibility	discussion
i.	array	vulnerability
j.	properties	man-made

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

a.	a synthetic cannabis	effect on rats
b.	cannabis had an antidepressant	damaging and lethal conditions
c.	injected with high	cells to regenerate
d.	a usual trigger of	of skepticism
e.	the chemical caused nerve	levels of an artificial substance
f.	treated with a degree	drugs
g.	results on rats are unlikely to be	substance
h.	A mountain	replicated in humans
i.	recreational	fear for rodents
j.	array of other	of previous research

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Cannabis may reduce depression

The _____ over the health benefits and dangers of cannabis, or marijuana, continues with the publication of a study in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* that showed rats given a _____ cannabis substance were less depressed and anxious. A research team from Canada's University of Saskatchewan observed that a chemical found in cannabis had an antidepressant _____ on rats. In the study, the animals were injected with high levels of an artificial substance similar to that found in cannabis, for a month and displayed less _____ when placed in new environments, a usual _____ of fear for _____. The team also found that the chemical caused nerve cells to _____ in the hippocampus area of the rats' brains, which is linked to _____ and depression.

trigger

synthetic

anxiety

anxiety

debate

regenerate

rodents

effect

The research data and findings are being treated with a _____ of skepticism from mental health experts, who warn that the laboratory results on rats are _____ to be replicated in humans. A _____ of previous research has linked cannabis to long-term damage to mental health and an increased _____ to anxiety and depression. However, scientists point out that other _____ drugs, such as alcohol and nicotine, perhaps carry more dangers than cannabis. Research indicates that _____ smoking and drinking increases anxiety and depression as well as significantly contributing to an _____ of other damaging and lethal conditions. Cannabis has been shown to have medicinal properties in relieving _____ of multiple sclerosis and other pain causing illnesses.

array

mountain

recreational

degree

symptoms

susceptibility

habitual

unlikely

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Cannabis may reduce depression

The debate over the health benefits and dangers of cannabis, or _____, continues with the publication of a study in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* that showed rats given a _____ cannabis substance were less depressed and _____. A research team from Canada's University of Saskatchewan observed that a chemical found in cannabis had an antidepressant effect on rats. In the study, the animals were injected with high levels of an _____ substance similar to that found in cannabis, for a month and _____ less anxiety when placed in new environments, a usual _____ ___ _____ for rodents. The team also found that the chemical caused nerve cells to _____ in the hippocampus area of the rats' brains, which is linked to anxiety and depression.

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AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms … for the words **'health'** and **'benefit'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning…?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "CANNABIS" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about cannabis / marijuana.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- debate
- synthetic
- antidepressant
- injected
- trigger
- hippocampus

- degree
- replicated
- susceptibility
- recreational
- array
- symptoms

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
b. Do you agree with the headline?
c. What do you think of when you hear the words "cannabis" or "marijuana"?
d. How dangerous do you think cannabis is?
e. Should cannabis be given to patients if it genuinely relieves their pain?
f. Why do you think cannabis is illegal but alcohol is legal in many countries?
g. Would you use cannabis to reduce anxiety if it was legal to do so?
h. Some scientists say cannabis is safer than many foods we commonly consume. What do you think of this?
i. Have you ever tried or would you like to try cannabis?
j. Have any high profile figures in your country used cannabis?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

a. Did you like reading this article?
b. What do you think about what you read?
c. What do you know about cannabis?
d. What is the punishment for possessing cannabis in your country?
e. What is the attitude of people in your country towards cannabis?
f. What do you think of Holland's laws that allow cannabis to be sold and used in "coffee shops"?
g. What would you do if you discovered your son or daughter smoking cannabis?
h. Do you think legalizing cannabis as a recreational drug would lead to an increase in crime?
i. Do you think cannabis should be legalized as a recreational drug?
j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
c. Was there a question you didn't like?
d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
e. What did you like talking about?
f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING 1

CANNABIS ROLE PLAY: Should cannabis be legalized? Team up with classmates who have been assigned the same role to develop your roles and discuss ideas and "strategies" before the role play begins. Introduce yourself to the other role players.

Role A – GOVERNMENT LEADER

You think all drugs are bad. Taking drugs is the cause of many social problems. Drugs destroy lives. Drugs finance many illegal activities and terrorism. If people want to relax, they can drink alcohol. Cannabis should not be allowed even for medicinal purposes. Society should encourage healthy lifestyles and healthy drugs.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY CANNABIS IS BAD.

Role B – CANNABIS USER

You are a normal person. You go to work every day and are never sick. You don't drink or smoke. You think alcohol is more dangerous than cannabis. Alcohol makes people violent and leads to alcoholism. Cannabis makes you relax and have fun. You think it is ridiculous doctors say it causes mental health problems. You think cannabis is a great medicine.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY CANNABIS SHOULD BE LEGALIZED.

Role C – MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SUFFERER

You use cannabis to relieve the pain caused by your multiple sclerosis. Other medicines had little effect on the pain. Cannabis has an immediate effect and makes your life bearable. You think it is outrageous other people want to take your medicine away. You know many people who have become seriously ill or have died through smoking cigarettes.

THINK OF REASONS WHY CANNABIS IS A LEGITIMATE DRUG.

Role D – DOCTOR

You think cannabis is a dangerous and addictive drug. A lot of research shows it leads to mental health problems. Cannabis impairs learning and results in many car crashes and workplace accidents. No health associations accept cannabis as a medicine. You believe real medicine is best.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY CANNABIS IS HARMFUL.

Change roles and repeat the role play. Comment in groups about the differences between the two role plays.

Should cannabis be legalized for medicinal or recreational purposes?

SPEAKING 2

DRUGS: You have been given the job of deciding a new drugs policy in your country. Write down the dangers of the drugs below. Decide whether the dangers are big enough to make the drug illegal. Decide on a punishment for people caught using the drug.

DRUG	DANGERS	ILLEGAL?	PUNISHMENT
Cocaine			
Caffeine			
Nicotine			
Alcohol			
Cocaine			
Other			

Change partners and tell each other your decisions. Together, combine your policies to make a new one.

Discuss whether or not your measures would be accepted in your country.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on cannabis. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. DRUGS: Make a poster describing a drug that is illegal in your country. Explain where the drug comes from, its effects on humans and its dangers. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

4. LETTER: Write a letter to the leader of your country. Explain your thoughts on the use of cannabis for medicinal and recreational purposes. Show your letters to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. F   b. T   c. F   d. F   e. F   f. F   g. T   h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

a.	debate	discussion
b.	synthetic	man-made
c.	anxiety	worry
d.	trigger	cause
e.	regenerate	produce
f.	skepticism	doubt
g.	replicated	copied
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PHRASE MATCH:

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g.	results on rats are unlikely to be	replicated in humans
h.	A mountain	of previous research
i.	recreational	drugs
j.	an array of other	damaging and lethal conditions

GAP FILL:

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