

# Will Cannabis Help Send Crohn's Disease Into Remission?

- By [Anna Wilcox](#)

There's no way around it, [Crohn's Disease](#) is awful. It can interfere with daily life in a very extreme and intrusive way, causing severe pain and many an urgent trip to the bathroom. Many Crohn's patients don't respond to conventional treatments or have trouble managing the severe side effects of immunosuppressant drugs. So, they turn to cannabis. But, can cannabis really send Crohn's into remission? How does it help the disease? Here's what the current research has to say.

## What is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's Disease is an irritable bowel disease with an unknown cause. Yet, the primary culprit is inflammation in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. This can be anywhere from your esophagus, stomach, small intestine, and the large intestine (colon).

However, the most commonly affected regions are the ileum, which is the very last part of the small intestine, and the first portion of the colon.

The standard theory about Crohn's Disease is that it involves genetic irregularities in the programming for the immune system. These irregularities can be triggered by environmental factors.

However, recent research on the human microbiome has discovered that a [dysbiosis of bacteria](#) in the gut has a major role to play in the disease.

# Symptoms of Crohn's Disease

The symptoms of Crohn's disease can vary depending on where you have the disease. But, some of the most common include:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe diarrhea
- Bloody stool
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Wasting (difficulty keeping on weight due to lack of nutrient absorption)

## How does cannabis work in Crohn's Disease?



[Photo credit](#)

Crohn's Disease is still largely misunderstood. But, as mentioned earlier, inflammation is the major trigger for many of the most debilitating symptoms.

When the GI tract is continuously inflamed, the body cannot properly absorb the nutrients it needs to survive. This leads to all sorts of short and long-term problems.

Many conventional Crohn's drugs seek to reduce inflammation and suppress the immune system, which is continually attacking the gut.

[Researchers think](#) that this is where cannabis can help. Compounds in the herb called [cannabinoids](#) have immunomodulatory effects. They prevent the immune system from releasing pro-inflammatory proteins and trigger anti-inflammatory compounds instead.

## **The endocannabinoid system and Crohn's Disease**

The herb has this effect because it engages a large network in the body known as the [endocannabinoid system \(ECS\)](#). The ECS consists of a series of cell receptors, their corresponding molecules, and the proteins that make and break down these molecules.

[Cannabinoid receptors](#) are found all throughout the gastrointestinal tract. They are specifically found on immune cells, indicating that the ECS is important for immune function.

In a [2013 review](#), authors Rudolf Schicho and Martin Storr explain that patients with irritable bowel disease produce fewer endocannabinoids, the body's natural THC.

They also state that certain cannabinoid receptors are overexpressed (upregulated). Upregulation is a sign that the intestinal tract is calling out for more cannabinoid inputs.

Scientists are far from pinpointing exactly how the endocannabinoid system is implicated in Crohn's. Yet, the current discoveries on the subject hint that cannabinoid therapies are serious contenders in the treatment of the disease.

## Cannabis and Crohn's human studies

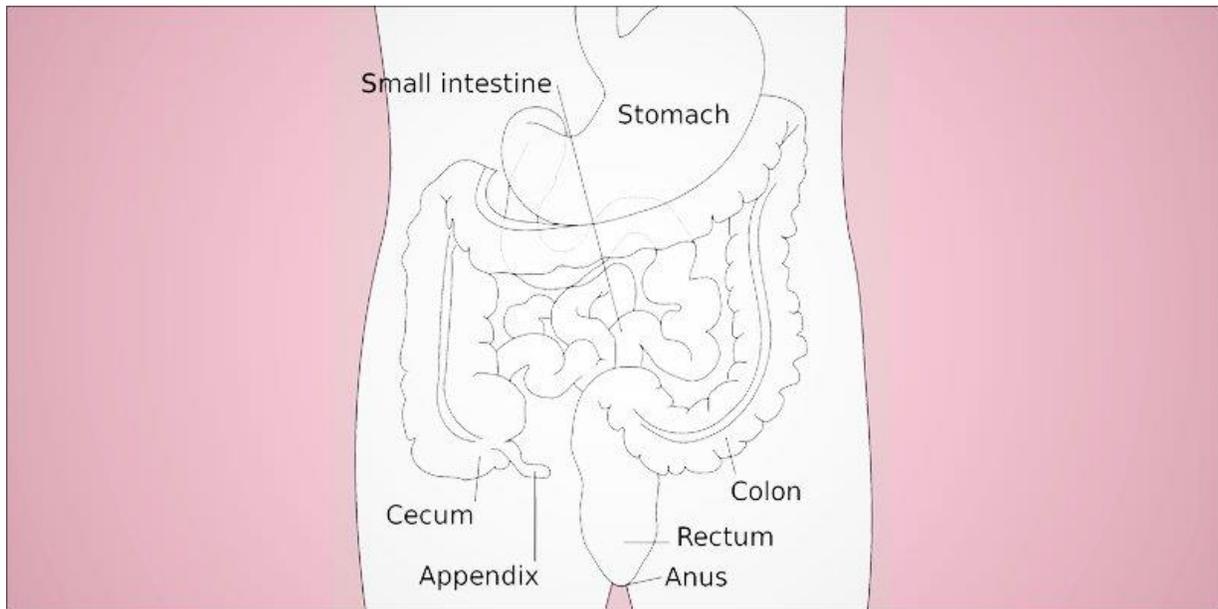


Photo credit

As with most cannabis research, there are few human studies to choose from. Thanks to research restrictions, performing large-scale clinical trials with the herb is nearly impossible. Still, some scientists have gone above and beyond to try to study cannabis treatment for Crohn's. Here are three major breakthroughs.

### Study 1: Polling

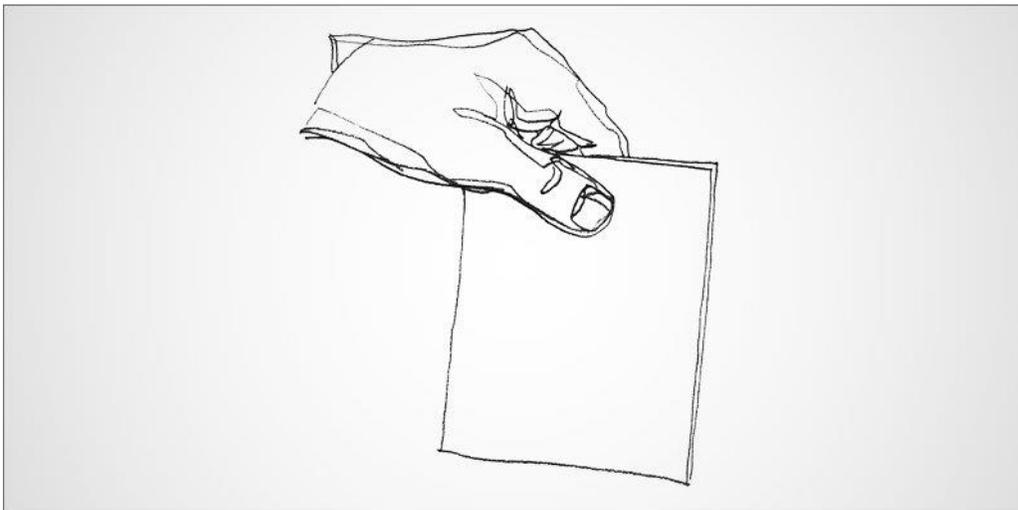


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In 2005, Tod Mikuriya, MD, and David Bearman, MD, [polled 12 cannabis-consuming Crohn's patients](#) about their symptoms post treatment. The pilot study found that cannabis patients not only saw an improvement in overall symptoms but were able to reduce the immunosuppressant drugs they take on a routine basis.

The study authors write,

For all signs and symptoms evaluated in the study, the patients described marked improvements with the use of cannabis. Beneficial effects were reported for appetite, pain, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, activity, and depression. Patients also reported that cannabis use resulted in weight gain, fewer stools per day and fewer flare-ups of less severity.

## Study 2: Observational evidence

[Photo credit](#)



A larger, [observational study from 2011](#) found similar results. 30 cannabis-consuming Crohn's patients were evaluated by their symptom improvement, the needed amount of immunosuppressant drugs, and the need for surgeries.

Cannabis was associated with significant improvements in the overall disease.

Prior to cannabis use, 15 of the patients underwent 19 surgeries in an average of 9 years. In the three-year period after cannabis treatment, only 2 surgeries were performed. Patients also had reduced need for pharmaceutical medications.

### **Study 3: A controlled trial**



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In 2013, researchers performed a [small placebo-controlled study](#) of 21 patients. The patients did not respond to traditional Crohn's treatments and their conditions were quite severe.

The participants were divided into two groups. The cannabis group received 115mg of THC in smoked cannabis twice daily. The control group received cannabis with the THC extracted. The treatment lasted 8 weeks with a two-week follow-up period.

5 of the 11 subjects in the cannabis group achieved complete remission of Crohn's disease. 10 out of 11 patients had a clinical response that included improved symptoms. The cannabis patients also reported no negative side effects and had improved appetite and sleep. During the study, 3 of the patients were able to come off of steroid drugs.

The downfall of this study is that it used smoked cannabis, not oral cannabis oils which have been anecdotally effective for many Crohn's patients.

## Anecdotal success stories

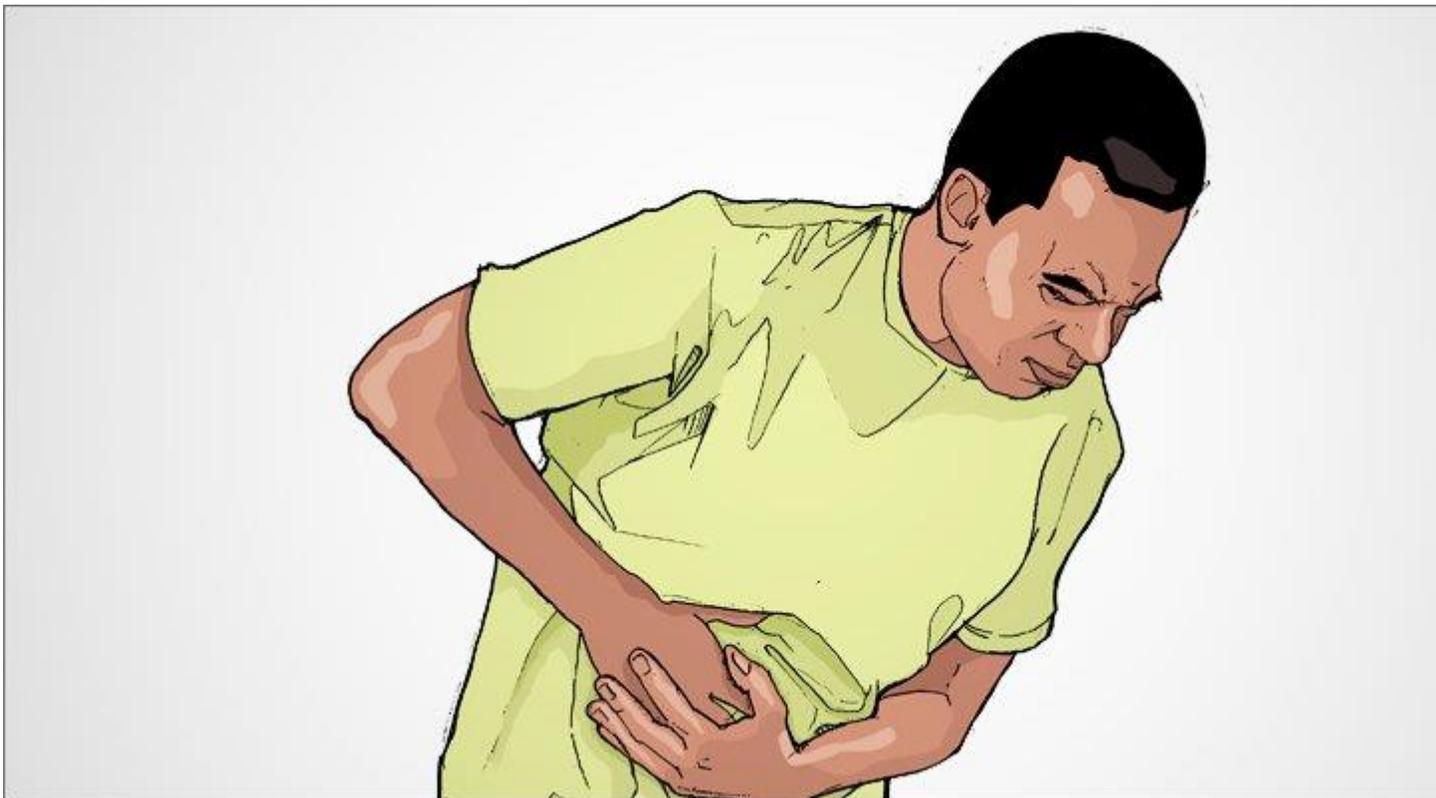


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There is a strong need for more controlled studies of medical cannabis for Crohn's disease. Yet, in recent years, a wealth of anecdotal evidence highlighting the herb's success has surfaced. Here are three amazing stories from Crohn's patients:

# 1. Matthew Lonsdale

Matthew Lonsdale had a difficult decision to make. He could either live with untreated Crohn's Disease or live with the side effects of the powerful immune suppressant medications used to treat the condition.

He chose to live with the Crohn's. This led to years of intense abdominal pain and a life chained to the nearest restroom. He explains,

I was unemployable [...] I literally had to map out places I would have to stop to get to work. At each gas station I would have to stop and use their bathroom. I mean, we're talking maybe every 10 or 15 minutes. I'd get to work, and there was a time when I was a carpenter and I had many employers say to me 'we're putting on roof trusses and you do incredible work, but we can't have a guy jumping off the roof every 15 minutes.'

Lonsdale discovered medical cannabis on accident. As fate would have it, he and a friend decided to split a hash brownie one day. The results were shocking.

I got up the next morning and experienced something in the bathroom that I've never experienced before, what it was like before Crohn's.

Over the next few days, Lonsdale began to eat little bits of the brownie as soon as he noticed symptoms return. Each time he ate the hash oil-infused treat, his symptoms would go away. He was so amazed that he contacted his doctor.

Unfortunately, his doctor would not recommend him for medical cannabis though it is legal in Maine. Instead, Lonsdale saved up and sought out a different doctor who could help him access the herb. While awaiting professional help, Lonsdale began experimenting with infusing hash in olive oil. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it continued to work.

Now, Lonsdale is off of all pharmaceutical medications. He continues to advocate for medical cannabis for Crohn's with fervor. He explains,

I want every single Crohn's patient out there immediately to know this works.

## 2. Coltyn Turner

Coltyn Turner is quickly becoming an iconic medical cannabis activist. He [made headlines](#) for his bold public response to cannabis naysayer Kevin Sabet.

Sabet is notorious for arguing that cannabis reform will harm children and teens. 16-year-old Coltyn has a different opinion. He uses a highly concentrated [cannabis oil](#) four times a day to manage his Crohn's Disease.

By his early teens, Coltyn was losing a battle against Crohn's disease. At eleven-years-old, he spent the majority of his time in three different locations. The sofa, the bathroom, and his bed. He had little appetite, was chronically fatigued, and eventually, could not stand for long periods of time.

I was just on every pharmaceutical there was out there until I wound up in a wheelchair.

Desperate to help their son, the Turner family uprooted from the Midwest to Colorado to access cannabis treatment. Coltyn Turner is a medical cannabis refugee. He [tells United Patients Group](#),

When we first started treating [the Crohn's], I felt better. I was starting to feel better, I had a little more energy, the pains weren't exactly gone, but they were reduced. This was just mainly because when we first came out here [Colorado], we were mainly getting our medicine from recreational dispensaries.

We would basically make them into little pot brownies. My dad would try one to see how it would affect him, and then he would cut it into quarters and give it to me.

Coltyn saw the effects of the cannabis [brownies](#) within a couple of days after treatment. While he had needed a wheelchair upon entering Colorado for the first time, after two weeks of treatment, he was able to visit the mountains and run and throw snowballs at his father. No wheelchair necessary.

Coltyn is now thriving and in remission. In 2015, he was recognized the Cannabis Advocate of the Year. He won over celebrity Melissa Etheridge.

### **3. Shona Banda**

[Shona Banda's](#) outspoken activism has helped many Crohn's patients find much-needed relief, including aforementioned Matthew Lonsdale.

Six years ago, Banda self-published a book titled *Live Free Or Die*. She wrote the book after discovering that cannabis oil was the life-saving medicine that she needed to overcome Crohn's Disease.

She had been bedridden, had multiple surgeries, and had taken copious pharmaceutical drugs. Her Crohn's progressed to terminal stages, where she began to drastically lose weight. She explains,

My body was starving because any food that I ate was gone within minutes. My body was just unable to absorb any of the nutrition that I was trying to give it.

After discovering [Rick Simpson's](#) video, *Run From The Cure*, she began experimenting with cannabis oil. The herb transformed her whole life.

I was just so sick for so long, that as soon as I tried the oil and started feeling way better [I knew] that there was no turning back. That was it. No medication that any doctor had ever given me had worked that well, for any reason.

Within three days of trying cannabis oil, she no longer needed to use her cane. She could stand upright and her life changed forever.

Unfortunately, Banda's recovery and activism have reached an unfortunate turning point. After her son told Banda's amazing story at school in their hometown in Kansas one day, child protective services took him away.

Banda was charged with five felony accounts for the possession of cannabis, intent to distribute, and child endangerment. During her trial, prosecutors put her son on the stand to testify against her.