

# UNC research discovery Marijuana not addictive

by Bill Lovin  
Staff Writer

UNC researchers have discovered the active ingredient in marijuana is not harmful or addictive and may have potential as a pain-killer.

Dr. William L. Dewey of N.C. Memorial Hospital said lab animals showed no signs of painful withdrawal after repeated treatments of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) were stopped.

Dewey said the animals were given massive doses of THC with no ill effects. Dewey called this the "most interesting single finding to date."

Animals receiving THC began to develop a tolerance to the drug. It is "of the same magnitude as tolerance to morphine," said Dr. Donald E. McMillan, one of the marijuana

researchers.

McMillan pointed out that tolerance to a drug is not the same thing as addiction. Though addiction and tolerance are related with such drugs as morphine, heroin and barbituates, this is not the case with THC.

This research finding is not really in contradiction to reports of marijuana users who claim it takes less "grass" to become high on successive days, according to McMillan.

This is explained because the active drugs in marijuana leave the blood very slow. Research findings indicate that 56 hours after THC is injected into the blood-stream, half of the drug will remain.

If a person takes a dose of THC on one day, he will need to take one-quarter of the original dose on the next day to bring

the THC level in his bloodstream up to the original level.

Dewey said "that one reason a person continues to get high after repeated use of the drug is that, although tolerance develops to many effects of the drug, it appears that tolerance does not develop to some of the psychological effects of THC or marijuana in man."

Drug peddlers have been selling what they say is pure THC, usually in tablet or powdered form. According to Dewey, none of this is real THC.

THC only occurs as a hard, dark resin of bluish tint. It must be kept refrigerated in nitrogen to prevent deterioration.

Another finding of the group may be the sedative effect of marijuana.

"Our studies have shown that THC has analgesic (pain-killing) effects in rats, mice and dogs,"

said Dewey. "Because THC is not addictive, it may be possible to use it instead of more dangerous, addictive drugs."

Hypertension and high blood pressure may be treated with marijuana.

"It's unusual for a drug to reduce blood pressure for more than four hours, but the effects of marijuana are of longer duration," said Dewey.

Most researchers have said the effect of THC on the brain is depressing but Dewey said it may be useful as an anti-depressant since users report a "heightened sense of well being."

The interacting effects of alcohol and marijuana are also being studied by the group. First results indicate alcohol and marijuana taken together in low doses tend to reduce the effects of each drug. But as the dosage

increases, lab animals experience addictive effects.

McMillan is studying the effects of marijuana on pigeons, in particular vision and hearing changes.

There are two known forms of THC found in marijuana plants, delta-8-THC and delta-9-THC. Delta-9-THC is the more potent and is the ingredient being studied at UNC.

Marijuana research was very difficult until two years ago when THC was isolated. Marijuana potency varies from plant to plant depending on THC content.

The UNC research group, headed by Dr. Louis Harris, is working under a \$50,000 a year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. One aim of the research is the possible use of marijuana to treat the mentally ill.

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