



# ANXIETY

## Clinical Summary

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# Anxiety

Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent psychiatric disorders,<sup>1</sup> causing significant distress and impairment in function. In 2013, an estimated 3 million Canadian adults reported having a mood and/or anxiety disorder,<sup>2</sup> which highlights the importance of having an effective management strategy. While drugs and psychotherapy form the backbone of anxiety treatment,<sup>3</sup> there is evidence suggesting that medical cannabis (MC) may also have a role. In fact, anxiety disorder is the top medical condition being treated at Harvest Medicine, with 87.49%, of 13017 patients, self-reporting that MC either very positively or positively impacted their quality of life (figure 1).<sup>4</sup> As MC is already playing a significant role in anxiety management, it would be worthwhile to discuss literature findings that detail the benefits and risks of MC use.

Evidence suggests that MC may have a role in the treatment of social anxiety disorder (SAD).

This is demonstrated by the results of a study conducted in treatment-naïve patients with social anxiety disorder (SAD).<sup>5</sup> These patients were randomized to receive either 600mg of CBD or placebo prior to a public speaking test and asked to rate their anxiety levels and other subjective states (e.g. discomfort in anticipation of the speech, proficiency) at multiple time points.<sup>5</sup> The researchers found that compared to the placebo, CBD reduced anxiety, discomfort, and proficiency levels close to those of healthy people, who did not have a diagnosis of SAD.<sup>5</sup> Another study in treatment-naïve male patients with SAD showed similar results, in which 400mg of oral CBD was associated with lower anxiety scores compared to the placebo.<sup>6</sup> The findings of these studies demonstrate that medical cannabis may be a promising treatment option for people with anxiety. Medical cannabis may also complement the conventional anxiety therapy.

In one study conducted at a large mental health clinic, patients with anxiety added CBD to their usual treatment (e.g. prescription medications, psychotherapy) in order to reduce or avoid psychiatric medication use.<sup>7</sup> Within one month, 79.2% of them reported decreased anxiety levels, and this improvement in anxiety symptoms persisted for the duration of their follow-up at the clinic.<sup>7</sup> This study shows that for patients that are experiencing side effects to psychiatric medications or not deriving adequate benefit from them, CBD may be a suitable option.

Although medical cannabis is generally well tolerated, like most other treatment options, there is still a risk of side effects. Fatigue, sedation, and worsening anxiety symptoms were reported by a few patients upon starting CBD treatment.<sup>7</sup> Also, anxiety is sometimes accompanied by other mental health conditions, whose symptoms may worsen if medical cannabis is used.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, while medical cannabis may be an appealing treatment option for people with anxiety, it is important to undergo thorough assessment by an experienced healthcare professional with routine follow-up.

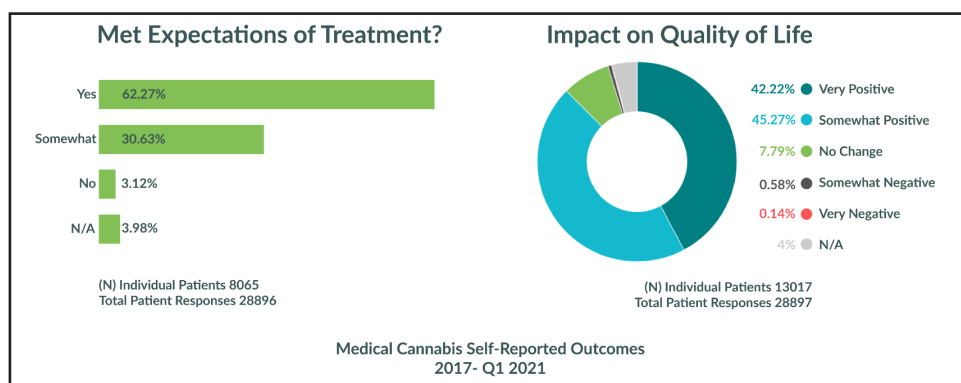


Figure 1 Harvest Medicine. (2021). Anxiety patient self-reported outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

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