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Research Snapshot

Does cannabis use affect success in quitting tobacco smoking?



What is this research about?

Cigarette smokers are more likely to use cannabis than non-smokers. Previous research has had mixed results regarding whether people who both smoke and use cannabis are less likely to quit smoking successfully when they try to quit. Much of the previous research has been done in laboratory settings rather than real-world medical practice settings. This research addressed this gap in the research by looking at cannabis use and smoking quit rates in people enrolled in the Smoking Treatment for Ontario Patients (STOP) program.



What did the researchers do?

Researchers looked at tobacco quit rates from 35,246 people who enrolled in the STOP program at 227 primary health care clinics between January 2014 and April 2016. STOP provides individualized treatment including nicotine replacement therapy combined with counselling. Clients were asked about their use of tobacco, medical and recreational cannabis at enrolment and at the 6-month follow-up mark.

The researchers explored whether people who used cannabis were more or less likely to quit smoking successfully than people who did not use cannabis. Successful quitting was defined as having not smoked for at least 30 days in a row. They also explored differences in quit rates between people who used cannabis recreationally versus people who used it for medical reasons.

What you need to know

People who smoke cigarettes are more likely to use cannabis than are non-smokers. When they enroll in smoking cessation programs (i.e., programs to help them quit smoking), people who use cannabis recreationally have lower success rates than people who do not use cannabis.



What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that, once age, sex, health, and socioeconomic factors were taken into account, people who used cannabis were 15% less likely than those who did not use cannabis to successfully quit smoking by the 6-month follow-up mark. When people were separated into groups by their reasons for using cannabis, the researchers found that people who used cannabis for recreational purposes were less successful in quitting smoking compared to people who did not use cannabis. However, no relationship was found between medical cannabis use and quitting.



Limitations and next steps

Data were self-reported and may be subject to memory recall accuracy. The research did not ask about frequency or amount of cannabis used, method of use (smoking versus eating), simultaneous use of cannabis and tobacco, or presence of cannabis use disorder. Findings might not apply to people receiving other forms of smoking cessation treatment. This research also took place prior to cannabis legalization.

About the researchers

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Keywords

Smoking cessation, cannabis, tobacco, medical marijuana

This Research Snapshot looks at the article, “Is cannabis use associated with tobacco cessation outcome? An observational cohort study in primary care” published in *Drug & Alcohol Dependence* in 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2019.107756>. This summary was written by Susan Eckerle.

How can you use this research?

Providers who work with clients who are trying to quit smoking should consider also discussing clients' cannabis use. Clients can be made aware that non-medical cannabis use is associated with unsuccessful quit attempts.