

Patient Education



Cannabinoid Hyperemesis

Cannabinoid Hyperemesis is frequent vomiting associated with the use of Cannabis (Pot/ Marijuana). This syndrome is becoming more common as more people are abusing cannabis.

Cause

- Cannabis has chemical compounds that the body breaks down into several simpler compounds.
- Some of the chemicals have a positive, beneficial effect for treating some specific ailments. There are some chemicals that have a negative effect. For example, one compound, CBD, helps to settle an upset stomach (nausea) in small doses. In higher amounts, the same compound (CBD) will cause vomiting.
- The risk of Hyperemesis occurring is directly related to the amount of cannabis used. People who use cannabis daily will have a higher chance of developing this syndrome.

Symptoms

Those who use cannabis daily and experience the following may be developing the syndrome:

- Long-term early morning nausea
- Abdominal discomfort
- Fear of Vomiting

Once the syndrome starts, a person will experience:

- Frequent vomiting for as many times at 5 times per hour
- General abdominal discomfort
- Weight loss
- May develop a habit of taking frequent long and hot showers or baths to ease the symptoms. This is a short-term remedy. People will eventually arrive at the local Emergency Department for help.

Treatment of Cannabinoid Hyperemesis

In the Emergency Department, the treatment is:

- Intravenous fluids infused into a vein to regain the fluid balance in the body.
- Medications may be given to try to relieve the nausea and vomiting.

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- Blood and urine tests are taken to determine if there is another cause of the vomiting. With cannabinoid hyperemesis the tests usually return as negative for other causes. The blood tests could show damage to the liver and the kidneys related to the constant vomiting.
- Other tests may include CT scans or X-rays, consults with specialists and more specific blood tests. These tests and treatments are expensive and put a strain on our health care system.

Long-term Effects

- The chronic frequent vomiting can cause a host of related issues. Vomiting can damage the stomach or esophagus and cause massive blood loss, which is difficult to control.
- Electrolyte imbalance can cause dangerous heart problems, including death.
- Dehydration can cause kidney failure.
- Weight loss and poor diet may cause liver disease.
- Frequent intravenous treatments will damage veins and make it difficult to start intravenous sites.

Preventing Cannabinoid Hyperemesis

- The easiest treatment you can do at home to prevent the syndrome or to treat it once you are diagnosed is to simply stop using cannabis (Marijuana/ Pot).
- Even an effort to reduce the drug abuse will help decrease the symptoms and episodes of the syndrome.
- Speak to your doctor for assistance and explore the reason you are using cannabis. There may be more reliable and less toxic treatments available for underlying problems.

This patient education was adapted with reference to:

- *National Institute of health, 2013 Jonathan A. Galli MD, Ronald Andari Sawaya MD, Frank K. Friedenberg MD.*
- *Mayo Clinic, 2012, Douglas A. Simonetto MD, Amy S. Oxentenko MD, Margot L. Herman MD, Jason H. Szostek MD.*
- *Current Psychiatry, 2013 Jie Chen MD, University of Washington, Robert M. McCarron DO, University of California.*

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