

Will pot soothe my feelings of depression and anxiety? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I really want to try pot because I am SICK of being uptight and careful all the time. I have been depressed and anxious for several years and I just want to feel SOMETHING different. But I've had a couple of panic attacks (both related to medication) and they were the most frightening things I've ever experienced. I'm scared that pot would do the same thing to me. What do you think? I know you can't encourage me to smoke pot but I would very much appreciate an honest answer, which I know you always give. (I know that smoking pot is not the best thing to do when you have depression and anxiety, but it would only be once, and I would be with friends. By the way, I'm not currently on medication as I find it useless. But I'm not trying to self-medicate. I just want to remember what it's like to experience an emotion that is not depression or anxiety). Thank you very much.

Answer

Dear Reader,

It can be extremely difficult to feel anxious, depressed, and seemingly unable to make yourself feel better. Your desire to find a solution is a great first step. Currently, the results are mixed on whether smoking marijuana (also commonly called pot or weed) can help with feelings of depression and anxiety. For instance, some research shows benefits of using marijuana to ease social anxiety, while other studies indicate that it may worsen panic disorders and potentially be correlated with depression. Given this, you may want to consider speaking with a health care provider or mental health professional to discuss alternative ways to address your anxiety and depression.

To determine how smoking pot may affect your feelings of anxiety and depression, it may be helpful to take a deeper look at the research. In some studies, individuals who use pot frequently report lower life satisfaction and poorer mental and physical health. However, the evidence isn't clear on whether smoking pot is the cause of these issues, but it's key to recognize the potential correlation. It's also helpful to note that using it even once could potentially increase anxiety levels and that there's research associating marijuana use with increased panic attacks.

Your idea to try pot once may not produce any negative effects, but tolerance can develop after

only a few days of regular use meaning that any benefit or relief you feel from smoking pot may worsen if smoking is discontinued. For example, multiple studies have shown that there may be anti-anxiety effects of medical marijuana, but once the marijuana was no longer used, study participants indicated that feelings of anxiety returned. Still, some health care providers may prescribe marijuana to help with symptoms of anxiety — though as with any treatment, it may not work for everyone. In addition, repeated use of marijuana can lead to the development of substance use disorder (SUD). Research suggests between 9 to 30 percent of those who use marijuana may develop marijuana SUD and people who begin using before age 18 are four to seven times more likely to develop SUD than those who start later. So while you're deciding whether to take a puff with friends, it's key to note that the benefits may only be temporary and there's potential for feeling worse later.

Shifting the focus, it may be helpful to consider exploring some alternatives to smoking pot if looking for relief from anxiety and depression. You may also want to look into mind-body practices such as [yoga](#) [2], tai-chi, or meditation. Additionally, incorporating physical activity into your routine (if you haven't done so already) may be beneficial. Research shows that regular activity may help decrease feelings of anxiety and depression.

Further, you mentioned that the medication you've tried in the past has had some undesirable side effects and you aren't currently taking anything. You may find it helpful to revisit the conversation with your health care provider if the current medications aren't working for you. Sometimes trial and error is required to find the appropriate type of medication and dosage for you. They may be able to prescribe alternative medications that may have fewer side effects and help you to feel better. Additionally, you may want to seek support from a mental health professional to help you cope with your feelings of depression and anxiety. They may have different strategies to help you feel more emotions again and to manage panic attacks if they occur. It's also possible they'll have insights into the use of marijuana to help with your symptoms.

Whatever you decide to do, it's helpful to know that support is out there if you need it.

Best of luck as you work through this experience,

Alice!

Category:

[Alcohol & Other Drugs](#) [3]

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[Mental Health Services \(CUIMC\)](#) ^[13]

Published date:

Mar 11, 2011

Last reviewed on:

Oct 18, 2019

Footer menu

▼ [Contact Alice!](#)

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- [Comments & Corrections](#)

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[1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/will-pot-soothe-my-feelings-depression-and-anxiety-0>

[2] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/health-benefits-yoga>

[3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>

[4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/marijuana-hash-other-cannabis>

[5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/emotional-health>

[6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/stress-anxiety>

[7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/moderate-marijuana-use-and-health-effects>

[8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/will-anti-anxiety-meds-make-me-zombie>

[9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/how-find-therapist>

[10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>

[11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/counseling-and-psychological-services-cps-morningside>

[12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>

[13] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/mental-health-services-cuimc>