

New Study Finds Cannabis Users Have Lower Obesity Rates

Regular marijuana users are significantly less likely to be obese compared to those who do not consume cannabis, according to a new study. The research highlights a “dose-response relationship” between marijuana use and body mass index (BMI), suggesting that the more frequently individuals use marijuana, the lower their BMI tends to be.

Key Findings on Cannabis Use and Obesity

The study found that individuals who had used cannabis in the past month were 31% less likely to be obese than non-users, even after adjusting for various factors. Moreover, daily marijuana users were found to be 32% less likely to be obese compared to those who do not use marijuana. The study’s authors suggest that as marijuana legalization and usage increase across the United States, there could be a corresponding decline in obesity rates.

Interestingly, the research also found that individuals who were obese reported significantly lower rates of past-month marijuana use. Specifically, the prevalence of cannabis use among obese individuals was 35% lower than among non-obese respondents. This trend was observed consistently across various demographic groups, employment statuses, and even among those with certain medical conditions such as asthma, arthritis, and depression.

Study Details and Methodology

The research was conducted by Ray Merrill, a professor in Brigham Young University’s public health department, using data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, a comprehensive telephone survey of U.S. adults. The analysis covered data from 2016 through 2022, with a total sample size of 735,921 individuals who completed an optional module on cannabis use during those years.

The study’s findings are set to be published in the journal *Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research*. The report concludes that “marijuana use is correlated with lower BMI,” and speculates that as the prevalence of marijuana use in the U.S. continues to rise, obesity rates may decline. However, the authors also caution healthcare providers to consider the known health risks associated with marijuana use when discussing these findings with patients.

Implications for Health and Medical Practice

Merrill emphasized that the findings align with previous research showing a correlation between marijuana use and lower BMI. He recommended that clinicians engage in discussions with patients who use marijuana, focusing on both the potential risks and benefits of the drug for their medical conditions and overall health.

While the study primarily focused on the relationship between marijuana use and obesity, it also noted that frequent marijuana users tend to be underweight more often than non-users. Although the paper did not explore the mechanisms behind the relationship between marijuana use and body mass, it did acknowledge that cannabis might be useful in managing nausea and potentially aiding in weight loss.

Broader Trends in Cannabis Use

The study also tracked changes in marijuana use over the study period, noting a significant increase in past-month cannabis consumption, particularly in states that have legalized marijuana. For instance, past-month use increased by 9% in states with legal medical marijuana, and by a staggering 89% in states with recreational markets compared to areas where cannabis remains illegal. Overall, the prevalence of past-month cannabis use nearly doubled during the study period, from 7.48% to 14.91%.

Challenging Stereotypes: Cannabis Use and Physical Activity

Despite cultural stereotypes that link cannabis use with laziness and overeating, recent research, including this study, suggests a more complex relationship between marijuana use and physical activity. A study published earlier this year found that young to midlife adults were neither more sedentary nor more active after consuming cannabis. In fact, marijuana use was associated with a slight increase in light exercise.

Other studies have further debunked the “lazy stoner” stereotype. For example, research published last year found that marijuana use could enhance the “runner’s high” and reduce pain during exercise, leading to a more enjoyable and effective workout experience. Another study in 2021 found that regular marijuana users are more likely to engage in physical activity compared to non-users.

The Future of Cannabis Research

As marijuana legalization continues to expand, so too will the body of research exploring its effects on health and wellness. The findings of this study contribute to a growing understanding of how cannabis may impact various aspects of health, including weight management and physical activity. However, as with any drug, the potential benefits of marijuana use must be weighed against the known risks, making continued research and informed clinical practice essential.

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