

Study Finds Cannabis Use Linked to Increased Light Physical Activity, Debunking ‘Lazy Stoner’ Myth

A new study investigating how recent cannabis use affects physical activity has debunked the long-held stereotype that marijuana makes people lazy. The research found that young to midlife adults were neither more sedentary nor more intensely active after consuming cannabis, although recent use was associated with a “marginal increase” in light exercise.

Key Findings of the Study

“Our findings provide evidence against existing concerns that cannabis use independently promotes sedentary behavior and decreases physical activity,” researchers wrote. They added that “the stereotypical ‘lazy stoner’ archetype historically portrayed with chronic cannabis use does not acknowledge the diverse uses of cannabis today.”

Data and Methodology

The report, published this week in the journal *Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research*, utilized data from Canada’s National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). During its 2011–2012 and 2013–2014 cycles, NHANES included information from wrist-worn accelerometers that tracked participants’ physical activity. Participants, aged 18 to 59, also completed a Drug Use Questionnaire detailing their current and lifetime use of substances such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine.

Largest Cohort Studied

Researchers described the findings, which drew on data from 4,666 adults—658 (14.1 percent) of whom reported using cannabis in the past 30 days—as “the largest cohort in which the relationship between cannabis use and physical activity has been studied.” The results showed little difference in sleep or physical activity between people who did and did not use marijuana within the past month, according to the accelerometer data.

Detailed Results

“No differences were found in the median daily awake versus asleep time, daily sedentary time, or daily [moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA)] time,” wrote authors from the University of Toronto and two Ontario hospitals. In fact, daily time spent doing light physical activity (LPA) was marginally higher among recent cannabis users.

“Median [interquartile range (IQR)] daily LPA time was greater in the recent cannabis use group,” the study noted. However, the difference was slight, with a median of 102 minutes of light physical activity per day

among recent cannabis users compared to 99 minutes per day among non-users.

Implications and Limitations

“With the rising prevalence of cannabis use, there have been concerns about its potential effects on physical activity levels,” the study concludes. “In this population-level analysis, recent cannabis use was not independently associated with daily sedentary time or MVPA, and it was associated with a marginally greater daily LPA time of unclear clinical significance.”

The study acknowledges potential limitations, noting that more than half of the recent cannabis users were aged 18–29, which might suggest a selection bias towards younger and healthier individuals. The survey data also did not include respondents’ motivations for cannabis use, such as exercise, pain, anxiety, or sleep, nor did it account for the frequency of consumption or product formulation.

Call for Further Research

Authors called for further research “to examine if these findings are generalizable to specific subgroups using cannabis for chronic or neuropathic pain.”

Broader Context of Cannabis Research

The study aligns with other recent findings that challenge widely held preconceptions about cannabis users. For example, a report last month concluded that there’s no association between habitual marijuana use and paranoia or decreased motivation. Another study in 2022 found no difference in apathy or reward-based behavior between regular cannabis users and non-users.

Additional research published in 2020 found that older adult cannabis users had lower body mass index (BMI) and engaged in more weekly exercise than non-users. A 2019 study found that people who use cannabis to enhance their workouts tend to get a healthier amount of exercise.

While the long-term effects of cannabis use are still being studied, findings from these and other recent studies suggest that some fears about marijuana use may be overblown. The latest research further challenges the ‘lazy stoner’ stereotype, indicating that cannabis use may be associated with increased light physical activity rather than promoting sedentary behavior.

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