

# Cannabis: Harm Reduction Counseling for Lactating Parents

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## Objectives

- Describe the history of cannabis in the US
- Explain the risk factors of cannabis use while breast/chestfeeding
- Use Trauma Informed, Participant Centered practices to explain recommendations for harm reduction if using cannabis use while breast/chestfeeding

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**Cannabis:** Genus of flowered plants indigenous to Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

**Endocannabinoid system (ECS):** A group of receptors that make up a very complex regulatory system throughout the brain, body, and central and peripheral nervous systems.

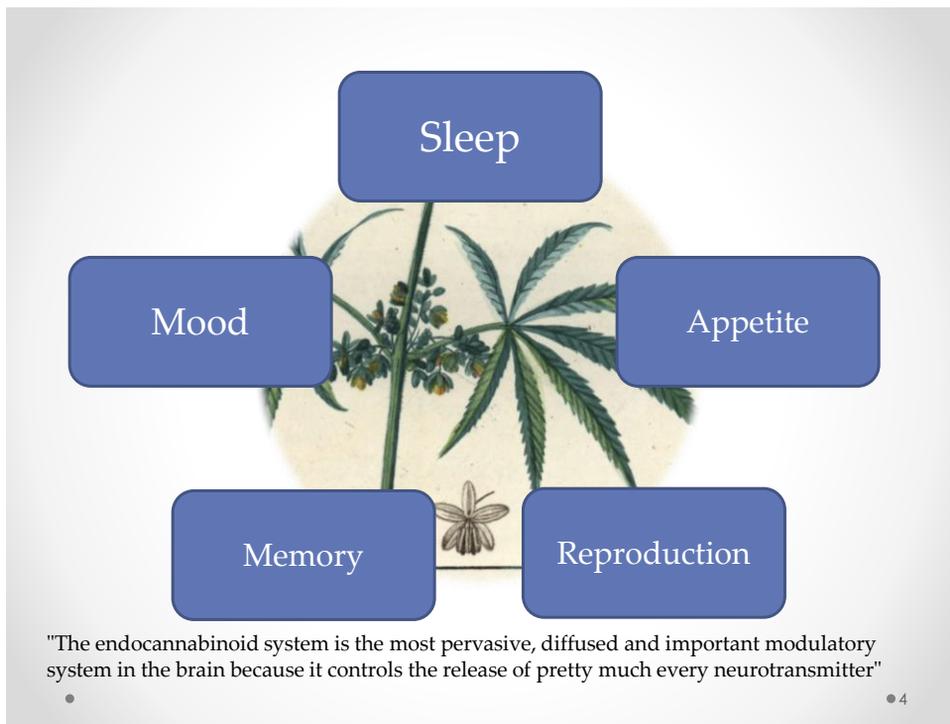
**Cannabidiol:** Also known as CBD, cannabidiol is one of over 100 molecules called cannabinoids found in the cannabis plant.

**Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC):** The most common cannabinoid found within the cannabis plant. THC accounts for most of the psychoactive effects.

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# Major Cannabinoids

- CBG (Cannabigerol)
- THC ( $\Delta^9$ -tetrahydrocannabinol)
- CBD (Cannabidiol)
- CBC (Cannabichromene)
- CBGV (Cannabigerivarin)
- THCV (Tetrahydrocannabivarin)
- CBDV (Cannabidivarin)
- CBCV (Cannabichromevarin)
- CBN (Cannabinol)

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Endocannabinoids, endogenous cannabinoids, are molecules made by the body which interact with the ECS.

109 endocannabinoids have been identified so far. The primary endocannabinoids are **anandamide and 2-archidonyl glycerol (2-AG)**.

There are two main endocannabinoid receptors:

- **CB1** - mostly found in the central nervous system
- **CB2** - mostly found in your peripheral nervous system, especially immune cells

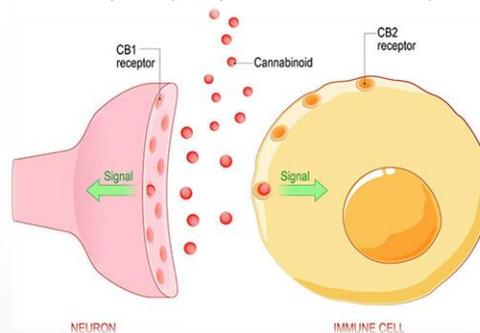


Image: Harvard Publishing

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# ADME - THC

- ...discussion

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When cannabinoids (e.g., THC) enter the brain it affects the following regions:

Hippocampus/Hypothalamus: Regulates hunger, improves appetite, reduces nausea

Hippocampus: Affects short-term memory

Cerebellum: Lack of coordination

Amygdala: Paranoia

Limbic System: Releases dopamine, feelings of pleasure

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Cannabis has been used for thousands of years for medicine. Cannabis pollen was found in large amounts in a grave dated to 2100 BCE along with an herb known to bring down fever.

Ancient Egyptians used cannabis and wrote about it as far back as 1700 BCE to treat glaucoma, hemorrhoids, and menstrual pain.

The Greeks used an infusion to treat ear pain and wounds. In Mesopotamia, it was used for depression. Cannabis has been cultivated in China for millennia for use as a fiber, food, and medicine.

Cannabis was a major component in religious practices in ancient India as well as in medicine for problems like insomnia, pain, and gastrointestinal disorders.

Indigenous American people have used cannabis to treat snakebites, as an analgesic, and a birth aid.

Image: The Herbal Center

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## History

- In the 1930s, the Federal Narcotics Bureau implemented stringent drug laws and unreasonably long prison sentences that gave rise to America's prison-industrial complex
- Led by Harry Anslinger, xenophobic, misogynistic, and openly racist, the Bureau waged a war on culture and sought to "restrain the Jazz culture"

Anslinger conflated drug use, race, and music.

"Reefer makes darkies think they're as good as white men. There are 100,000 total marijuana smokers in the U.S., and most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos and entertainers. Their Satanic music, jazz and swing result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers and...others."

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Anslinger told lies through storytelling meant to activate the fear of racial mingling. Using print, public statements, and even film to pass his message.

In 1936, the film "Reefer Madness" was released and preyed upon the carefully constructed fears of the public. Newspapers ran headlines like "Murders Due to 'Killer Drug' Marihuana Sweeping the United States."

*"Not long ago the body of a young girl lay crushed on the sidewalk after a plunge from a Chicago apartment window. Everyone called it suicide, but actually it was murder. The killer was a narcotic known to America as marijuana, and to history as hashish."*

Image: Timeline

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Anslinger's efforts culminated in the passage of the **Marijuana Tax Act in 1937**, which effectively made cannabis illegal.



The **Boggs Act of 1951** which required mandatory sentencing and was followed by various state laws further criminalizing drug use built the prison industrial complex we know today.



Image: NYTimes

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*"The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people ... We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities."*

*~ John Ehrlichman, Assistant to the President for Domestic*



Image: DailyKOS

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During the eighties, Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign was paired with race-based media hysteria about "crack" and created the punitive drug war we know today.

*"Leading medical researchers are coming to the conclusion that marijuana...is probably the most dangerous drug in the United States." – Ronald Regan*

1980: Campaign promises from Reagan included "cracking down" on illegal drugs which revitalized the War on Drugs.

Image: PR Week

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1911 - Prohibition

1973 - Decriminalization

1996 - Medicinal

2012 - Recreational

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The image shows a vertical timeline of cannabis legislation in the United States. It consists of four blue rectangular boxes, each containing a year and a key event. To the left of each box is a small image related to that event: a vintage bottle of 'CANNABIS, U.S.P.' (1911), a cannabis leaf with a 'POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS' sign and handcuffs (1973), a person in a lab coat holding a cannabis leaf and a vial (1996), and a cannabis leaf inside a red prohibition sign (2012). A small black dot is visible in the bottom left corner of the slide area, and the number '16' is in the bottom right corner.

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# Who uses cannabis in the perinatal period?

- ...discussion

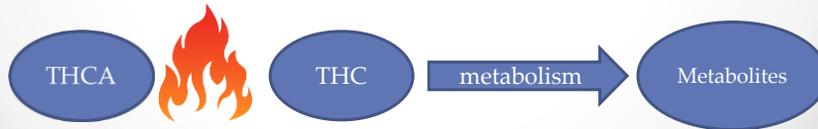
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The image shows a slide with a title and a bullet point. The title is 'Who uses cannabis in the perinatal period?' in a large, blue, serif font. Below the title is a single bullet point: '• ...discussion'. A small black dot is visible in the bottom left corner of the slide area, and the number '18' is in the bottom right corner.

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## Cannabis and Lactation Research

- Studies prior to 2018 were flawed and biased
- Studies reflect cultural bias
- Research was lacking due to legal status and limitations on testing pregnant and lactating people
- With legalization for medicinal and recreational use, ethical and high-quality research opportunity has become an option



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## Preliminary Data

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# More research

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# Is it safe?

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## Organizational recommendations

- **Lactmed (National Institutes of Health)**  
"Because breastfeeding can mitigate some of the effects of smoking and little evidence of serious infant harm has been seen, it appears preferable to encourage mothers who use cannabis to continue breastfeeding and reducing or abstaining from cannabis use while minimizing infant exposure to the smoke."
- **Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine**  
"At this time, although the data are not strong enough to recommend not breastfeeding with any marijuana use, we urge caution."
- **American Academy of Pediatrics - The Transfer of Drugs and Therapeutics Into Human Breast Milk**  
"Therefore, with the exception of radioactive compounds requiring temporary cessation of breastfeeding, the reader will be referred to LactMed to obtain the most current data on an individual medication."

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## Harm Reduction Considerations

- ...discussion

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# Counseling

- Participant Centered Education (PCE) focuses on people's capacities, strengths and developmental needs – not solely on their problems, risks, or negative behaviors. Participant centered services **emphasize collaboration with the participant**, giving them the freedom to choose options that work for them.
- OARS  
Open-ended questions. Affirmations. Reflections. Summaries.
- Principles of the PCE model:
  - Respect** – includes respect for participant's time, culture & living circumstances
  - Empathy** – key to understanding client's particular needs & key to successful interpersonal interaction
  - Individualize** – tailoring information to the particular needs and goals of your client
  - Motivate** – finding different strategies to encourage clients to engage in healthy activities

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# Trauma Informed

- A trauma informed approach often includes:
- **Safety** – ensuring the physical and emotional safety
  - **Trustworthiness & transparency** – respectful and professional. Building relationships
  - **Collaboration & mutuality** – choice, patients are provided clear messages about their power to make decisions
  - **Empowerment & choice** – allow for validation and affirmation
  - **Cultural, historical & gender issues** – culturally responsive, respects traditional cultures, addresses historical trauma

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# Discussion Guide

Using non-judgmental approach:

- Ask about the frequency and amount of use
- Ask about cannabis helps them
- Ask who cares for the child when the parent is using cannabis
- Come up with harm reduction strategies which support the family
- Validate the parent's feelings *without* validating their choice of substance use
- Talk to parent about alternatives during breast/chestfeeding
- Offer services/counseling resources
- For daily users, discuss benefits of screening for developmental milestones

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