

New Frontiers in Medicine: Cooking With Weed

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New Frontiers in Medicine: Cooking With Weed

How edible cannabis is helping with pain relief and symptom management.



A crockpot for pot? Yes, a company has created one that allows you to prepare cannabis butters, sauces

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By Kristine Crane | Oct. 1, 2014 | 11:25 a.m. EDT

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At the Takoma Wellness Center in the District of Columbia, an unusual cooking demonstration took place Tuesday morning. Chef Joey Galliano prepared his mother's "Kushie Tomato Soup" using ingredients you might expect: San Marzano canned tomatoes, onion, heavy cream, garlic and saffron. But the secret to the sauce? Cannabis, commonly known as marijuana.

Unlike the pot brownies of yesteryear – when weed was literally thrown into the batter – the tomato soup, and other foods featured at Tuesday's demo (including caramel apples, pesto and butter), had undergone a process of decarboxylation to extract the high-giving ingredient called tetrahydrocannabinol, also known as THC. Magical Butter, the Florida-based company that put on the demo, invented the crockpot where cannabis is turned into various sauces, butters, alcoholic drinks and even lotions.

The District of Columbia was Magical Butter's fifth stop, following demos in Seattle, Denver, Chicago and New York. CEO Garyn Angel came up with the idea when a friend of his with Crohn's disease couldn't smoke marijuana for pain relief because he also had asthma. But his friend wanted to experience the pain relief the plant can provide. Cooking with cannabis is nothing new, but Angel wanted to invent something that was both easy to use and fun. "There's a lot of magic in cannabis," he adds.

From the company's signature lime green color (which the chefs and staff donned on Tuesday) to the "light show" on the crockpot that takes place as the cannabis infuses into oil, butter or alcohol, to recipes the company provides, such as limoncello and gooey grilled cheese, the fun factor is real – and has proven to be a powerful marketing tool. Based in Port Richey, Florida, the company, which started two years ago, has already sold more than 40,000 crockpots worldwide. Its biggest market in the U.S. is the company's home state, Angel says. Medicinal marijuana is still illegal in Florida, and the voter referendum to legalize it is on the ballot next month.

Medicinal marijuana is currently legal in 23 states and the District of Columbia. Its legal status hasn't stopped people everywhere from investing in the crockpot, which can be ordered online for \$175.

[Read: [Taking Your Life Back From Chronic Pain.](#)]

Start Small – and Don't Overdo It

Angel advises people to start small and add a pinch of cannabis into whatever they are making. "It may take two or three weeks to figure out" the correct amount, he says. "There's never been an overdose from cannabis, which is an incredible statistic."

"It's a patient empowerment thing rather than following a physician's script," Angel continues.

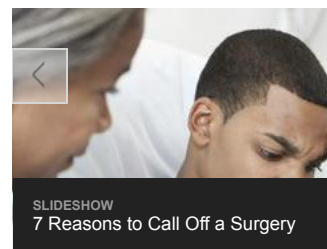
Stephanie Kahn, who co-founded the Takoma Wellness Center, which is one of three medical marijuana dispensaries in the District of Columbia, says that everyone wanting cannabis – regardless of their illness or condition – has to have a physician's recommendation to get it. That recommendation is then sent to the city's health department, which in turn provides people with a script for the cannabis. An investigator from the District of Columbia's health department who attended Tuesday's cooking demo says they regulate cannabis for safe and appropriate use just as they would any pharmaceutical.

Kahn, who is also a nurse who formerly worked in addiction medicine, says cannabis poses "nowhere near the risk of addiction as oxycodone" and other commonly prescribed pain medications. Cannabis may pose a psychological, rather than physical, risk, however, causing irritability and fatigue.

The District of Columbia currently has 1,500 people enrolled in its medical marijuana program, with half of those registered at the Takoma Wellness Center. A handful showed up on Tuesday. Michael Wilson, a 66-year-old with multiple sclerosis, has been trying various medications and other remedies, including snake and bee venom, to cope with MS since his diagnosis in 1991. On occasion, he's smoked marijuana, which hasn't made him feel any worse, he says. Now, he's eager to try an edible. Edible forms of marijuana, unlike the smoked form, are said to have a longer-lasting effect.

Wilson wants to make cannabutter to put on his popcorn. "I just want good information so that it will give me a buzz," he said, adding that he's practicing the Hippocratic Oath – do no harm – on himself.

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Cannabis: A History of Pain Relief

Kahn and her husband, Rabbi Jeffrey Kahn, opened their dispensary a little over a year ago – after three and a half years of paperwork and bureaucratic loopholes. The 350-page application, Stephanie says, was more rigorous than her husband's master's thesis in theology.

"We come from helping professions," Stephanie continues, so the urge to do something to help people was natural and came from a very heartfelt place. Stephanie's father was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, like Wilson, in his 30s. His doctors suggested he move to a warmer climate, so the family moved to Miami, but the humidity only amplified his pain, Kahn says. Meanwhile, he discovered marijuana. "It helped his spasms and neuropathy," she adds. "I grew up seeing that this was the only thing that really worked."

When Kahn's mother was diagnosed with late-stage lung cancer, her doctor also suggested that she use marijuana for pain relief, but she passed away before the family could find any, Kahn says. After her mother died, and Kahn was searching for a way to memorialize her, Jeffrey came up with the idea of a dispensary.

"I almost fell over," Stephanie Kahn says. "I was not thinking [of that] as something in memory of my parents." But a year into the endeavor, she realizes the dispensary is the perfect tribute – because it's changing people's lives and putting them out of pain. A picture of her parents hangs in the waiting room, where you can peruse leaflets on different types of cannabinoids like tea types at a gourmet tea shop.

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Where Cannabis Fits Into Medical Practice

Patrick Fasusi, an interventional pain doctor and anesthesiologist in the District of Columbia, has sent several of his patients to the Kahns' dispensary. He recommends cannabis for all types of patients with pain, from [menstrual cramps](#) and migraines to cancer. Where cannabis has a real edge over pharmaceutical drugs, however, is for people suffering from anxiety and sleep disorders. "Cannabis allows them to relax enough in order to sleep without the hangover effect they would get from other drugs," Fasusi says. He started reading up on marijuana after patients who had been on four or five drugs complained that the drugs weren't working or that the side effects were too unpleasant.

"Marijuana gives us another means to be able to help patients," Fasusi says. As for [the risk of addiction](#) – a factor that has some doctors opposed to marijuana's legalization – Fasusi says the amount allotted, at least in the District (2 ounces every 30 days) is probably not enough to pose any real risk. And the fact that only registered dispensaries are allowed to dole out marijuana legally makes accountability less of a concern, he adds.

Still, for most of his patients, cannabis is an adjunct medication to their regular treatments, and he suspects it will stay that way. Studies are needed to convince more of the medical establishment of marijuana's medicinal efficacy, he adds. "You've gotta start from somewhere. And this is the beginning."

[Read: [A Patient's Guide to Second Opinions.](#)]

TAGS: medical marijuana, patients, patient safety, pain management, health, doctors, health care, patient advice



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