



*Treating*  
EPILEPSY

**An ailment that has vexed humanity since antiquity was first in helping us understand CBD as medicine.**



**T**he first stone to move in what would become a landslide of medicinal CBD was a seizure treatment. It was through the stories of people like Charlotte Figi, a girl who had her first seizure at 3 months old and suffered as many as hundreds a month, that even deep-red states at the forefront of the war on drugs had to take notice of the healing potential of cannabinoids.

Finding a way to keep epilepsy under control can be life-changing—or even life-saving. Injuries can happen during seizures. People with uncontrolled seizures can't drive. Epilepsy has even been associated with sudden and unexplained deaths. Not even politicians proved callous enough to ignore an opportunity to save children from all this. As if to prove the point, the FDA chose in 2018 to approve its first CBD-based medication—an epilepsy medication called Epidiolex. This landmark had been years in the making, with advocates like the parents of children like Charlotte speaking up and research accumulating to the point where it was impossible even for the federal behemoth to ignore.

One of the first nails was hammered into CBD prohibition's coffin when a study was published last year in *The Lancet*, in which researchers gave either a brand name form of CBD called Epidiolex or a placebo to more than 170 people with Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, a rare, severe and difficult-to-treat form of epilepsy. Adding CBD to other anti-seizure medications cut down

on the number of seizures a person experienced each month by 41 percent. By contrast, the placebo reduced the number by about 14 percent.

The findings from the new study didn't surprise Dr. Jerzy Szaflarski, the director of the epilepsy center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Other CBD trials conducted recently for epilepsy—some using Epidiolex—showed similar results. Epidiolex has also been studied in people with another severe form of epilepsy, Dravet syndrome.

"It's very exciting that it shows efficacy," said one of the researchers, Dr. Elizabeth Thiele, the director of the pediatric epilepsy program at Massachusetts General Hospital. "And of course there's been a huge amount of interest because it's cannabidiol." That having been said, it was hardly a new idea in 2018 to treat epilepsy with cannabis.

Up until the 1800s, physicians would routinely use cannabis to treat conditions including epilepsy, Thiele told *Newsweek*. But in the 20th century, federal and state governments clamped down. In the 1970s, the Controlled Substances Act made studying marijuana-related compounds nearly impossible. "It's going to be kind of tragic that all of this was put on hold for decades," Thiele said.

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