

The Endocannabinoid System: State Maintenance or Cognitive Impairment?

ABSURD HEALTH INSTITUTE | 15 OCTOBER 2026 | VI. Psychedelic state medicine and the biology of joy

Abstract

This concept paper examines the endocannabinoid system: state maintenance or cognitive impairment?. It develops an argument drawn from Psychedelic Terrain Medicine, identifies the relevant biological or clinical mechanisms, and considers where that argument may fail. This is a narrative perspective, not a systematic review or an original clinical study.

The central problem

Endocannabinoid signaling influences synaptic transmission, appetite, pain processing, affect and aspects of stress response. The source book speculates that low-dose cannabis exposure could help some individuals sustain reduced rumination or discomfort after a major psychological shift. The critical question is whether any apparent benefit can be separated from intoxication, tolerance, withdrawal, cognitive impairment and psychiatric risk. “Microdosing” lacks a standardized medical definition for cannabis and must not be treated as an established therapeutic protocol.

Mechanisms and causal architecture

CB1 receptor signaling is widespread in the central nervous system; THC and CBD have distinct, complex pharmacology, and product composition varies widely. Changes in subjective anxiety and sleep onset may not mean sleep architecture or long-term function improves. Regular exposure can lead to tolerance and withdrawal-associated sleep disturbance. Some individuals report pain relief, whereas others experience panic, slowed cognition, impaired driving or dependence. The balance of effects depends on formulation, exposure pattern, age, underlying illness and vulnerability. It is therefore insufficient to label the endocannabinoid system a universal “calm switch.”

A discriminating example

A low subjective dose of cannabis may still be behaviorally active, and product variability means 'microdose' can hide very different exposures. An improved night of sleep does not prove long-term sleep health, and less rumination does not prove improved executive function. Any maintenance proposal has to examine dependence, cognition, psychiatric history and lawful clinical context.

Competing explanations and limitations

Observational epidemiology links frequent and high-potency cannabis use with increased psychosis risk, with substantial complexities of confounding and causality; that risk must be weighed seriously in any mental-health proposal. A patient with bipolar-spectrum or psychotic vulnerability may be harmed even by a substance promoted as gentle. A favorable case report does not establish maintenance efficacy, and long-term daily use may undermine the cognitive agency the intervention seeks to restore.

What evidence would change the interpretation?

An adequate investigation would specify THC/CBD exposure, route, product quality, frequency, baseline diagnosis, cognition, functioning, tolerance, withdrawal and serious adverse events. Durable improvement should be shown relative to relevant controls and separated from temporary sedation or altered symptom reporting.

Implications for medical interpretation

The most defensible publication is a balanced mechanistic review of potential regulation and documented harms, not a recommendation to self-administer cannabis for chronic disease or trauma.

Selected scientific reading

Di Forti et al. (2019), Cannabis exposure and incidence of psychotic disorder across Europe, *Lancet Psychiatry*.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(19\)30048-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30048-3)

McEwen (1998), Protective and damaging effects of stress mediators, *New England Journal of Medicine*.
<https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJM199801153380307>

Original source: Psychedelic Terrain Medicine. All source books supplied by the author.

Conceptual research commentary. Not a peer-reviewed clinical study, original trial, systematic review, validated diagnostic instrument or treatment protocol. Consult qualified care for medical decisions.