

Hope and Healing with Cannabis: A Personal Story

By Donna Sage, MSSA

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Introduction

INFLAMMATION OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM can have many causes, including traumatic brain injury and neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, and seizures.

Cannabidiol, or CBD, is a cannabinoid derived from the cannabis plant (commonly known as marijuana) that has been found to be effective in reducing nervous system inflammation. CBD also appears to be effective in reducing or eliminating seizures and tremors, shrinking cancer tumors, supporting cardiovascular health, and reducing or eliminating pain and headaches of all kinds. CBD is safe and natural, and at the cost of less than one dollar per day, it is becoming a go-to medicine for people of all ages.

CBD isolate does not produce euphoria, or the "high" associated with marijuana, and it is non-toxic. It is synergistic with tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which can produce euphoria, but CBD will often produce significant benefits when used alone.

When I was looking for solutions for my daughter's and mother-in-law's suffering, the information on CBD was so difficult to find, so overwhelming, and so taboo that I almost gave up my search. Then I came across a website called the Realm of Caring (RoC) at <https://www.theroc.us>.

RoC is a non-profit organization committed to cannabis research. It offers a sophisticated array of cannabis resources, education, and advocacy for cannabis treatment. The organization empowers consumers to make educated choices in healthcare, spreads the truth about cannabis, and expands access to cannabis to those in need.

RoC care specialist John Matu says that the pain epidemic in America touches one in three people and that opioid addiction is at an all-time high. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that the number of overdose deaths involving opioids has quadrupled since 1999; ninety-one Americans die every day from opioid overdose. Matu states:

"There is a huge paradigm shift occurring as cannabis is being recognized as a safe, effective, and now legal medicine for people of all ages. The majority of cannabis users are older, and cannabis use crosses all demographic lines."

Ashley's Story

My daughter, Ashley, suffered two separate concussions. She received treatment for them over a period of three years by four different medical specialists. After endless suffering and many toxic and expensive pharmaceutical treatments, Ashley's "green parachute" to relief and recovery turned out to be cannabis. Before we found cannabis, we tried everything that conventional medicine had to offer, and none of the treatments relieved my daughter's debilitating headaches.

I had the opportunity to compare the results produced by three very different approaches to Ashley's concussion treatment:

- REAP: Remove/reduce physical, cognitive, and mental demands (i.e., rest); educate others of symptoms; accommodate academically; pace activity. This approach yielded six months of intense pain and suffering, with no improvement in Ashley's condition.
- Prescription drugs: This approach proved to be expensive, toxic, and completely ineffective.
- Cannabidiol: This approach proved to be non-toxic, and it relieved Ashley's incapacitating headaches within thirty minutes—at a cost of less than one dollar per day. We eventually supplemented the CBD with THC to obtain more comprehensive relief of our daughter's concussion symptoms.

Prior to using CBD, we tried a long list of interventions in conjunction with the medical and pharmaceutical efforts. We also proactively managed Ashley's emotional stress (which was critical in preventing pain spikes) and her rest. None of the interventions

produced significant pain relief, although we believe they contributed to her well-being. We tried:

- Chiropractic: We mostly used the Activator Method, PulStar therapy, and dry needling therapy to avoid further head trauma.
 - Vestibular Physical Therapy (with cardiovascular challenges): This method did not reduce Ashley's headache pain, but it was helpful in restoring greater body movement and in improving her eye-hand coordination and balance.
 - Cranial Release Technique (CRT): This treatment released the traumatized fascia inside Ashley's skull and created space for her cerebrospinal fluid to move freely, thereby promoting healing. Her facial symmetry was restored, and I noticed a significant improvement in her disposition and emotional state.
 - Vision assessments: Ashley wore glasses before her concussions and still does. Both an ophthalmologist
- and an optometrist examined her, and it was determined that she does not have vision-related headaches.
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR): This physiotherapy treatment was implemented for six months.
 - Massage and acupressure: These treatments were aimed at relieving whiplash and promoting relaxation and energy flow.
 - Supplements: Ashley took turmeric, omega-3, vitamin Bs, N-acetyl cysteine (NAC), magnesium, vitamin E, Co-enzyme Q10, L-carnitine, grape seed extract, and ginkgo biloba.
 - Other modalities: She tried breathing and relaxation exercises, visualizations, and therapeutic as well as relaxation massage.
 - Sleep: Ashley followed a highly structured sleep schedule. (Sleep is often a problem for concussion patients.)
 - Hydration: We ensured she received consistent and optimal hydration.



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Over a two-year period, multiple doctors recommended antidepressants. They were not optimistic that the drugs would reduce Ashley's pain, but they pointed out that it was a cheap and easy treatment to try. We refused them each time. Here is why each time, for the following reasons.

Yes, Ashley was probably depressed; after all, she had lost her identity as an athlete and a scholar. However, antidepressants would have been ineffective in healing her traumatic brain injury, and we were justifiably concerned about the risk of suicide.

We also knew parents who had given their teenaged concussion sufferers antidepressants and then slowly watched their children lose their "spark" and become angry, self-harming, and withdrawn—while at the same time obtaining zero pain relief.

We also refused Botox injections, as Ashley's pain was not induced by tension.

Ashley took several oral prescription drugs, all of which proved ineffective:

- Zomig: This is a migraine medicine.
- Promethazine: Ashley tried this antipsychotic drug for a few days without benefit. We chose to discontinue it because of the potential for severe side effects.
- Cambia: This is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) that is prescribed for migraine headaches. It retails for \$454.89 per dose, but we were desperate enough to purchase a few doses. Ashley used it twice, and both times it brought a pain spike of 7 back down to the baseline of 5. However, this drug can be used only two times a week because of risks associated with serious liver toxicity.
- Propranolol: This drug showed some initial promise by decreasing Ashley's anxiety, primarily by lowering her already low blood pressure. However, after a few days, she became highly agitated and her headache pain actually increased.

At one point, Ashley was hospitalized so she could be given an intravenous (IV) cocktail of Depakote (an anti-seizure medicine), Toradol (an NSAID), and diphenhydramine (Benadryl used as an anti-seizure medicine) in an attempt to "reboot" her brain. This

decision was an aggressive and desperate attempt to get Ashley's headaches under control. It did not work. In fact, after she regained consciousness, her headache was worse.

Her doctor recommended that we give the IV treatment a second try. We declined. We also declined oral doses of Depakote because of its ineffectiveness in the more aggressive IV regimen.

I believe that all of the doctors we consulted were acting in good faith and doing what they were trained to do. They used all of the resources at their command in their attempts to help Ashley. Unfortunately, multiple trips to doctors, the procedures, and the pharmaceutical drugs were creating even more stress on her delicate system.

As parents, my husband, Alan, and I felt hopeless and resigned. I could tell how Ashley felt just by looking at her, so I stopped asking. Her inner light was dim and foggy. She was always edgy, and she was quick to anger.

The life that Ashley once had as an honor student and competitive athlete was gone. I was watching my daughter disappear, and it broke my heart.

Alan and I spent hours on the internet searching for alternative treatment options that our medical professionals, to whom we had already devoted so much time and money, had not offered.

One day Alan stumbled across an article about the possible benefits of marijuana for football players managing head injuries. This was the only new lead that we had, so I pursued it relentlessly. My research led me to believe that Ashley should try CBD, which was easy for us to obtain here in Colorado.

“Unfortunately, multiple trips to doctors, the procedures, and the pharmaceutical drugs were creating even more stress on her delicate system”

As a neuroprotectant, CBD is being used to by the Israeli Defense Forces to limit neurological damage following head trauma. It is also effective in limiting damage following vascular events, such as stroke and myocardial infarction and in the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases, including Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and Dementia. Since CBD is essentially non-psychoactive, therapies can be administered at higher dosages without motor impairment or toxicity that may be associated with higher doses of THC.

—Alan Frankel, MD, in “Neuroscience: The Study and Application of Cannabis Medicine” at greenbridged.com.

Plantain Weed & Digestion

Dandelions are commonly known to be beneficial plants. But do you know about its innocuous neighbor, the lowly plantain weed? This humble plant does especially well in poor, rocky soil. It is often found growing alongside dandelion and can also be found in gravel pits and construction sites, working hard to restore soil in the area.

Plantain (the weed, not the banana) grows all over North America, having been introduced by Europeans in the 1600s. The seeds and leaves are renowned for their healing effects on the digestive system and can repair damage from antibiotics, Celiac disease, and anti-inflammatory and pain medications. Steep as a tea or add to soups.

An infusion can be helpful for coughs, colds, and other lung problems, as plantain is a gentle expectorant. It can even be used as a soothing remedy for hemorrhoids by bathing the area with plenty of cooled infusion.

A poultice of chewed or pounded plantain leaves is astringent and can pull toxins from the body. Place the poultice directly over bee stings, bug bites, acne, slivers, or rashes, and bandage the area. Allow the poultice to remain in place for four to twelve hours to speed healing of the site.

—Adapted from “This Little Weed Is One of the Most Useful Medicines on the Planet” by Jess Smith at <http://www.realfarmacy.com/this-little-weed-is-one-of-the-most-useful-medicines-on-the-planet/>.

Once we received the CBD, I gave Ashley a dose of about 20 mg. Thirty minutes later I heard the sweetest words I could imagine: “Mom! Mom! My headache is gone, like I mean really gone!” Ashley was experiencing relief from her acute headache for the first time in months. Her emerald green eyes were clear and bright, and she was smiling. I had not seen that smile in a very long time. Her relief was palpable.

We expanded our knowledge of the uses of CBD, and we learned how to employ CBD oils and a CBD vapor pen. The positive results Ashley experienced inspired us to procure a medical marijuana card from the state of Colorado so that we could begin occasionally supplementing the CBD with THC. Our goal was to completely eliminate Ashley’s chronic post-concussion headaches.

The combination of CBD and THC is very effective in relieving pain, although we have been conservative in its use because of incomplete data on the impact of THC on the developing brain. However, I feel it is much safer to give my daughter small doses of CBD and THC than have her pumped full of anticonvulsants, antipsychotics, and toxic NSAIDS.

Cannabis has been the key to Ashley’s recovery from her post-concussion syndrome and pain. Not only has it eliminated her severe and constant headaches, which potent pharmaceutical drugs could not touch, but it has also reduced the inflammation in her brain and stimulated its healing.

Ashley, in teenage fashion, tells it like it is: “I felt so annoyed and frustrated with the doctors. I did everything they said, and nothing worked. Some things even made me feel worse.” She adds, “Forget about what you think you know about cannabis, and start looking at how much it is helping people, people like me and my grandma. Open up your eyes; it really works!”

After more than two years of doctor visits and multiple school team meetings, we naturally wanted to share our exciting news with Ashley’s care team. I must admit that I was anxious about telling the doctors and her school about the CBD treatment that was working for her. I was prepared for a wide range of reactions, from excitement to resistance due to the controversy surrounding CBD treatment.

The concussion specialist was not interested in any of our cannabis interventions or results. One neurologist advised against its use because there had not been adequate research conducted on medical cannabis, specifically with respect to concussion recovery in a minor. I did however receive a “high five” from our pediatrician’s office.

Ashley’s teachers and counselor witnessed her healing firsthand. Just as we had, they saw how much better Ashley was feeling and performing, and that she was smiling again.

Our school district has a comprehensive concussion protocol, and our doctors did a great job of helping us communicate with Ashley’s accommodating teachers regarding modifications to her academic load.

Although I was initially reluctant to publicly advocate for cannabis, my husband, daughter, and I decided that if we could help even one person, it would be worth coming out of the “cannabis closet.”

Grandma Lynda's Story

Ashley's Grandma Lynda, a smart and capable woman, is a college-educated computer software engineer. She has suffered from bizarre and debilitating neurological symptoms since 1993. She was first thought to have multiple sclerosis, then she switched doctors and was accurately diagnosed with severe essential tremor syndrome and fibromyalgia.

Lynda's tremors were primarily in her head and neck and caused severe disequilibrium. Without medication, she couldn't hold a spoon or a cup and was unable to walk. Her head and eyes shook so uncontrollably that she was not even able to read. She had been heavily sedated for twenty-four years, and her doctors had gradually increased her anti-seizure medication dosages to levels that were dangerously toxic.

The doctors did frequent blood work to monitor Lynda's kidney and liver functions because of the toxicity of the drugs she was taking. Her doctor informed her that she would need to eventually discontinue the drugs, and when she got the point, there would be no other options to treat her symptoms.

Lynda had been taking 250 mg of Primidone, an anticonvulsant, three times a day; 0.25 mg of Mirapex, often prescribed for Parkinson's, three times a day; and 120 mg of propranolol, for tremors, three times a day.

At one point she considered trying an electrical brain stimulator but chose not to because of the risks. She had Botox injections for eighteen years, at a cost of about three thousand dollars per treatment. Each treatment involved twenty-five injections into her neck. The shots were very painful, but they did release her muscles for up to three months at a time. Lynda says, "One time, my neck and esophagus were paralyzed by the Botox. Not being able to swallow or hold my head up was not very fun." She discontinued the treatments when her insurance changed and she no longer had coverage.

I eventually suggested Lynda try CBD. She slowly weaned herself off of her prescription medicines while taking 30 to 50 mg of CBD daily. She was able to manage most of her symptoms with CBD alone, although she eventually added a modest 5 to 10 mg of THC to the CBD and gained 100 percent control over her tremors and pain.

Even though she was feeling better, Lynda became worried that her friends and family members would find out she was taking THC, so she discontinued it. Fortunately, by then the CBD alone was able to keep her severe tremors at bay.

Lynda now takes 30 to 50 mg of CBD daily, depending on her activity and stress levels, to control her tremors and pain. She has also discontinued the hydrocortisone and pain pills she had been taking to treat her fibromyalgia.

One day Lynda jokingly told me, "One time Grandpa accidentally took one of my pills, and he slept for three days. Those pills are horse tranquilizers. Now that I have stopped taking all this medicine, I feel like a million bucks!"

Psychiatric Medication & Violence

On May 17, 2017, Chris Cornell of Soundgarden committed suicide. His family suspect that his anti-anxiety prescription drug led to the altered state he was in the night he died.

Many people are just beginning to question how much we can trust the profit-driven global pharmaceutical industries to tell the truth about the serious, often fatal side effects of psychiatric medicines. One outspoken critic, Kelly Brogan, MD, writes that the FDA and the pharmaceutical industry have gone to great lengths to conceal multiple instances of harm, including impulsive suicide and homicide.

A landmark 2001 study that supported prescribing antidepressants to children was re-analyzed in the context of risks. Researchers know that these medications are ineffective in children and can lead directly to suicidal behavior.

Non-violent, non-depressed, non-psychotic people can become violent to themselves and others. A 2011 paper showed ten cases of extreme violence committed by patients taking prescribed antidepressants. When the patients stopped taking the drug, they returned to their baseline personalities.

—Adapted from "The Violence-Inducing Effects of Psychiatric Medication" by Kelly Brogan, MD. Available at <http://www.greenmedinfo.com>.

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Lynda wants every senior citizen to hear her story. She wants to inspire them to have an open mind regarding the natural, non-toxic, medical miracle of cannabis. She says, "I had never tried any cannabis until the age of sixty-five, when I finally wised up and became educated and more open-minded. I knew that all the drugs I was taking to help me were also killing me. I didn't have any other choice until I was willing to open my eyes and grow in my consciousness. I want everyone to have the freedom to choose cannabis for his or her medical treatment. I have no doubt that cannabis is not only relieving all my tremor and fibromyalgia symptoms, it's even starting to help my husband and his arthritis pain."

Before using CBD, both Ashley and Lynda followed the recommendations of doctors and specialists until they had exhausted all the mainstream medical treatments. The availability of safe and legal cannabis products proved vital to Ashley's and Lynda's health. Cannabis was the only thing that broke the cycles of headaches and tremors from which my loved ones had been suffering.

At the time of this writing, cannabidiol, one of more than a hundred cannabinoids derived from the cannabis plant, is 100 percent legal in all fifty states. Even if your state has not legalized marijuana or any other form of cannabis, CBD can be legally purchased online and delivered directly to your door. Making marijuana illegal across the country again would have a chilling effect on the medical community's ability to research its vast untapped therapeutic potential. All forms of cannabis should be legalized.

My home state of Colorado is a cannabis pioneer, and I am thankful to live in a state where I can legally implement my own health strategies. Had the traditional approaches worked, my family and I would never have found out about the amazing healing benefits of cannabis.

Only after exhausting all options offered by the mainstream medical profession did we try cannabis as a last-ditch option. Knowing what I know now, however, cannabis should have been the first thing we tried. Δ

DONNA SAGE, M.S.S.A. (donna@coloradosage.net), is a mother, trophy wife, and health educator and lives in Denver, Colorado.

ASHLEY SAGE intends to research cannabis and its medical applications while she is in college. Lynda is a "Gourmet Grandma" who lives in Colorado.