

They're not chasing a high: Why adults over 60 are flocking to cannabis edibles

May 8 2026



Credit: AI-generated image

For adults over 60, cannabis use is increasing faster than in any other demographic. But science has yet to keep up with why older adults are using cannabis products, which products they choose, and how they make decisions about which products to use.

A new study by researchers from University of Utah Health and University of Colorado Boulder reveals that many older adults start cannabis seeking more effective or non-pharmaceutical options to manage sleep, pain, or mental health, and that many people base their decisions on word of mouth rather than discussions with health care providers.

The results [are published](#) in *JAMA Network Open*.

Many seek more effective options to manage common health conditions

The researchers interviewed 169 [adults over 60](#) who were about to purchase cannabis for the first time to identify common motivations.

"Overall, they really wanted a better quality of life, reducing their pain, getting better sleep, and being able to enjoy time with family and friends a little bit more," says Rebecca Delaney, Ph.D., assistant professor of population health sciences at U of U Health and first author on the study.

"For the most part, we found that these folks aren't really interested in getting high. They just want to feel better," adds Angela Bryan, Ph.D., professor of psychology and neuroscience at CU Boulder and senior author on the study.

Many participants had heard positive anecdotes about product usefulness from friends or family members, which tended to influence decisions.

"They brought a lot of feedback from other people to inform their opinions," Delaney says. "Word of mouth has a really big impact."

Discussions with medical providers were rarely part of the picture, suggesting that better informational materials for patients and providers

could be needed to drive conversations and help people make informed decisions about their health.

To CBD or to THC, that is the question

Older adults also faced the question of which products to use. Edible cannabis products may contain tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, the main psychoactive component of cannabis), cannabidiol (CBD), or both, and it was unclear what motivated and informed their decisions about which to purchase.

Many people perceived CBD-only products as therapeutically beneficial, which was often driven by anecdotal claims. People tended to perceive THC as offering benefits like improving mood. But most people chose combination products containing both, seeing them as a "Goldilocks option" that gives the best of both worlds.

Toward better decision-making

An important caveat is that the survey was conducted in Colorado, where recreational cannabis is legal. For older adults in Utah and other states where only medical use is permitted, the decision-making process may look different. But Delaney suspects that people's core motivations—using cannabis to attempt to treat chronic pain, poor sleep, or mental health concerns—are probably the same.

Delaney says that the results help show people's baseline understanding of using cannabis to address health concerns, providing a foundation to develop better informational tools and clinical support.

"The ultimate goal is to develop resources to help people make decisions and find products that meet their needs, and to figure out how we can

distill information to patients and physicians," Delaney says.

"We would really love to see more of these conversations happening between physicians and patients to make sure that people feel supported and informed when seeking alternative ways to address their pain."

More information: Edible Cannabis and Pain, Sleep, and Mental Health Management in Older Adults, *JAMA Network Open* (2026). [jamanetwork.com/journals/jaman ... tworkopen.2026.11718](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jaman...tworkopen.2026.11718)

Provided by University of Utah Health Sciences

Citation: They're not chasing a high: Why adults over 60 are flocking to cannabis edibles (2026, May 8) retrieved 8 May 2026 from <https://sciencex.com/news/2026-05-theyre-high-adults-flocking-cannabis.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.