

Cannabis Edibles, Unwrapped: Here's What No One Tells You

 [dailyburn.com /life/lifestyle/cannabis-edibles-health-effects-420/](https://dailyburn.com/life/lifestyle/cannabis-edibles-health-effects-420/)

4/19/2017

The pot brownie is so passé. As four new states [joined](#) the recreational stoner club following last fall's election, the nation is discovering new ways to eat its THC. (That's tetrahydrocannabinol, the psychoactive agent that gets you high.)

South Denver caterer Sweet Grass Kitchen specializes in peanut butter and jelly cups with THC-infused shortbread. The Los Angeles chocolatier To Whom It May boasts healthy cannabis creations, such as smoked [almond butter](#) truffles, without refined sugars, soy or corn. The Viceland network even hosts an edibles-themed reality show called "Bong Appetit" featuring "hotboxed" tuna and ice cream with liquid nitrogen pearls of weed juice.

Understanding Edibles: It's All a Little Hazy

Yet amid all this culinary creativity in a booming edibles market, health experts worry that eager new consumers don't understand that our bodies metabolize marijuana differently when you ingest it instead of [smoke](#) it. If you eat it too quickly without waiting to see how it affects you, you might be setting yourself up for more misery than fun. And while you can't overdose or die from the stuff, you might experience severe anxiety that resembles a panic attack. One [study](#) found that people who took 10 times the legal dose suffered from psychotic episodes.

Even a standard dose can knock you off your center. A 2017 National Institutes of Health [study](#) looking at how much marijuana impacted driving safety found that unlike smokers, people who ingested the drug showed significant impairment between 1.5 and 3.5 hours later. Their pupils were dilated, and they had trouble standing on one leg and doing an exercise involving walking and turning.

"Interest in edibles is growing. People are talking about it. More celebrities are talking about it," says Francois Lamy, PhD, of the Boonshoft School of Medicine at Wright State University in Ohio, who recently conducted a [study](#) on the surge of edible mentions on Twitter. "People consider it healthier because they're not smoking it. But they're so naïve about it." While more than half of Twitter mentions were positive, 13 percent were negative. Sample tweets included: "I took it and nothing happened" or "I took it and it was too strong." "There were a lot of tweets along the lines of 'Last night was terrible,'" says Lamy.

First Stop: Your Liver

| *"Nearly a quarter of edible products contained more THC than indicated on the packaging."*

When you smoke a joint, you feel high within minutes because the THC goes through the lungs and is quickly absorbed into your blood stream. On the other hand, your liver metabolizes the marijuana lurking in food, so it takes longer to feel the drug's full effect. "Ingested marijuana takes at least 30 to 90 minutes to get absorbed, and the peak is two to four hours," says neurobehavioral pharmacologist Jenny Wiley, PhD, who [studies](#) how edible marijuana should be regulated for the research institute RTI International in North Carolina. "One of the issues with edibles is that people take a little bit, but they won't feel anything. Then they take more. By the time it hits them, they've taken too much."

States like Colorado have tried to help consumers make better decisions with [labeling](#) laws that include dosing information, but Wiley suggests starting out with less until you know how well you tolerate it. That's why Sweet

Grass offers a lower-dose “canna-butter melt” that’s one-fourth the standard 10 milligram dosage. The cocktail-themed flavors include Mojito Mint, White Russian and Moscow Mule. “We say it’s like having a glass of wine or a beer,” explains Executive Chef Lauren Finesilver. “It’s a great entry-level product for people who are curious or haven’t experimented in a long time.”

Cannabis Labeling: Anything Goes

Don’t rely on labels alone, though, especially when one 2015 [study](#) showed that nearly a quarter of edible products contained more THC than indicated on the packaging. (Never mind those cookies that came from a caterer or your boyfriend’s kitchen.) “People like edibles because there’s no smoking, smell or second-hand smoke involved,” explains Sheryl Cates, deputy director of RTI’s food, nutrition and obesity policy research group who led focus group on edibles in Washington and Colorado.

| *“Experts aren’t sure if edibles hit women differently than men.”*

“Some people say it gives them a more relaxing, laid-back kind of high than smoking. But there were also problems with unexpected highs that lasted longer than people had anticipated.” In her focus group, one woman complained of still feeling high the next morning after eating an edible the night before. Another got so unexpectedly stoned on a camping trip she worried she wouldn’t be able to respond in an emergency. Now one Washington state cannabis chocolate manufacturer includes this warning on its label: “Until you know the effects, just eat half!”

So Where’s the Research?

It’s up to you to figure out how much you handle because there’s a shocking lack of research on how edibles affect different people, says Wiley. “Marijuana is still federally illegal,” she says. “In order to do research, we can’t buy what’s a legal product in one state and ship it to our research lab in North Carolina,” she says. “It stymies doing the kind of research we need to do.” That means experts aren’t sure if edibles hit women differently than men. (Some animal research suggests it does, says Wiley). The same goes for whether you eat them on an [empty stomach](#), although she admits it’s common sense that you’ll feel high faster if your body isn’t trying to compete with a big pasta meal to metabolize your marijuana.

Until more research is available, it’s best to approach edibles just like you found your sweet spot with drinking – carefully. “As the culture starts to learn more about marijuana, people will learn more about how it affects them the same way people became knowledgeable about [alcohol](#),” adds Morgan Fox, spokesperson for the Marijuana Policy Project. “They have to know their own personal limits.”