

Hot Topicals

Topical cannabis offers pain relief without the head high **BY ALEX V. CIPOLLE**

We've all rubbed a salve into a sore muscle or joint and breathed a sweet sigh of relief. There are the old standbys, Icy Hot or BenGay. Tiger balm has saved my lower back with its cool, soothing cloud of numbness.

Now there's a new player in the topical pain relief game — topical cannabis.

"It's just like Tiger Balm," says Chelsea Hopkins, co-owner of The Greener Side dispensary on Oak Street. "It targets one specific area, gives you that pain relief and sometimes it's a lot more effective than just smoking and kind of forgetting about the pain."

Topicals — ointments, oils, lotions, creams, salves, balms — are growing in popularity as the stigma around marijuana fades and as the plant's medicinal properties are increasingly studied. Leafly, a leading cannabis review site, named topicals as one of 2014's "biggest trends in cannabis culture." Topical cannabis is poised to find widespread popularity due to its targeted pain relief, its medium of use and the fact that it won't get you stoned.

"When I first opened the store, I wasn't thinking about topicals at all," Lisa Della Croce tells me in a little side room at Kush MMD. When owner-operator Della Croce opened the dispensary and wellness center downtown on 10th Avenue in May, she only sold one topical; now she sells four. She says a vendor brought in samples and the rest is history. "Those just went out the door."

Della Croce says she uses a Monumental Medicines salve for her nerve pain and Grandma's Old Time Ointment for arthritis. Her clients also use topicals to aid with Parkinson's, fibromyalgia, migraines and muscle spasms.

"I also noticed that our older clientele like the topicals a lot as well," Della Croce says. "If their last resort comes to medical

marijuana, and they're tentative about smoking or eating it, the topicals — they're like 'Sure, I'll try that.'"

Hopkins adds that topicals are great for menstrual cramps and pregnancy pains. "When I was pregnant, I got round ligament cramps," she says. "When you're carrying a child it's really hard on your body, and I used a salve, and it was the only thing that got rid of those cramps."

Hopkins recommends Empower Oil, crafted by Portland's Trista Okel and named by *High Times* magazine as a top 10 topical.

Applying a topical will not produce any psychoactive effect (i.e., you won't get high) because it is not processed through the liver like marijuana that's smoked or eaten. "Some people don't want to be altered to get their medicine," Della Croce says.

Topical use, Della Croce and Hopkins say, will not show up in a drug screen, either, because lotions and salves do not enter the bloodstream (or only in negligible amounts).

Currently, only OMMP cardholders can rejoice in the relief of topical cannabis. For the rest of us seeking respite from our creaking bones and aching muscles, put topicals on your shopping list for July 1, 2015, when recreational marijuana use in Oregon becomes legal. ■



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