Marijuana and anxiety: Panacea or Pandora’s Box?

- Marijuana: THC and CBD
- Medical marijuana/CBD benefits for nausea and mood
- The risks: schizophrenia, psychosis, cognitive effects and worse anxiety
- Toxins in marijuana and smoking dangers
- Marijuana addiction and why it’s different from 20 years ago
- The use of targeted amino acids for breaking the addiction

Trudy Scott: Welcome to The Anxiety Summit Season 4. I am your host, Trudy Scott, food mood expert, certified nutritionist, and author of The Antianxiety Food Solution. Today we have rather an interesting topic. It is “Marijuana and Anxiety: Panacea or Pandora’s Box?” And we have Dr. Hyla Cass, nationally acclaimed physician, board certified in psychiatry and integrative medicine, author of The Addicted Brain and How to Break Free here to talk with me about this. Hi Dr. Cass. How are you?

Hyla Cass: I’m great. How are you?

Trudy Scott: I’m great. Thank you so much for joining us. I’m excited to be talking to you about this topic. I think it’s something that’s near and dear to both of our hearts because we have seen people in our practices that have been affected by marijuana use and we want to share some of those concerns so there is awareness as to some of the possible effects that marijuana can have on certain susceptible individuals.
Hyla Cass: Right. And also not only the whole marijuana issue which is highly controversial right now but also where does CBD or cannabidiol fit in. And then medical marijuana fits in here somewhere as well. So it’s a very broad topic and I’m excited to be talking about it because I’m confronted with it almost on a daily level in my psychiatric practice, in my online blog and just in general out there in the world. So thanks for doing this and thanks for holding these amazing summits Trudy. I have to tell you I’ve listened to every one of your summits and I participated in some of them. And you’re doing just an amazing job.

Trudy Scott: Thank you. It’s great to have you back and I haven’t done your formal introduction so I’d like to do that for folks who may not know you. I’m sure by now most people who’ve been following me on my blog and through the summits are very familiar with Dr. Hyla Cass. She’s a very popular speaker on the summits and I’m really excited to have you here talking on this topic because I know addiction is a big area of focus for you and you’ve got some great solutions when it comes to addiction. And we’re going to be talking about addiction in relationship to this topic towards the end of the interview. So it’s really a great pleasure to have you here and thanks for your kind words as well.

So let me read your bio. Dr. Hyla Cass is one of the country’s foremost authors and experts on the subject of integrative medicine combining the best of leading edge natural medicine with modern science in a clinical practice of 30 years, writings, lectures and nationwide media appearances. She’s recognized for helping people come off both psychiatric medication and substances of abuse, which is what I just mentioned, with the use of targeting nutritional supplements using her own unique formulations. These formulations also serve to enhance mind, mood, energy and memory naturally.

She’s widely quoted in newspapers and magazines including the L.A. Times, the Toronto Star, Cosmopolitan, Newsweek, People magazine. She also appears regularly on radio and TV on shows such as the Dr. Oz Show, The View, E! Entertainment and MSNBC. And Dr. Cass is also the author of several popular books including the User’s Guide to Herbal Remedies, St. John’s Wort: Nature’s Blues Buster, Natural Highs, Supplement Your Prescription: What Your Doctor Doesn’t Know About Nutrition, 8 Weeks to Vibrant Health and The Addicted Brain and How to Break Free. And you can see more at her website cassmd.com.

So we picked this title Marijuana and Anxiety: Panacea or Pandora’s Box because… let’s first just go through the definitions. Panacea is a hypothetical remedy for all ills or diseases. And as Dr. Cass said at the
beginning there are a lot of people that feel that marijuana or cannabis is the fix all for everything. And then on the other side we’ve got Pandora’s Box. The definition of this is it has come to signify the source of endless complications or trouble. And as I said earlier the reason we wanted to talk about this is just because we had seen some of the bad effects in some of our clients and patients in the case of Dr. Cass. And when people are raving about how amazing it is the bad effects are not often discussed or it just get a small mention at the bottom of an article.

So we wanted to do this so could just share some of the bad effects. And as you said earlier marijuana’s a big topic and it’s not just one thing. And I think maybe it would be good to start with the fact that it’s not just one thing that we’re talking about. We’ve got these compounds in there - the THC and the CBD - and this can vary even within different marijuana strains.

_Hyla Cass:_ Right. So people need to know what we’re talking about. So the marijuana plant, cannabis sativa is a complicated plant. It has probably 85 different ingredients and one of them is THC which is what makes you high. And another one is cannabidiol and that together with some of the other ingredients are what has the effect. Now CBD doesn’t actually have the effect of being stoned or being high. CBD, in fact, which is the ingredient I’m talking about now, the more medicinal ingredient actually counteracts the high of THC. So if you’re following me so far there’s the THC that’s psychoactive and then there the CBD, cannabidiol that is really a different compound. And they’re related only because they come from the same plant. They’re also related in that they both have similar positive effects. And it may be hard to separate them out except – and this is an important point. You can take the CBD and that is the product that’s not psychoactive, does not get you high. You can take CBD that has no THC in it and have all the positive medical effects that you would get from say medical marijuana.

So I think I need to emphasize that. So we’re not giving up anything by taking out the psychoactive part. However, there are some pitfalls to the psychoactive part and its many shades of gray here that we’ll get into.

_Trudy Scott:_ Excellent. And I’m really glad you made that clarification. And they can extract the CBD from plants and I believe they use that as an oil. And I’ve heard some benefits from using that. But then you can actually grow different strains with different amounts of THC and CBD. And you can actually pick a plant that’s got more of one versus the other. Is that correct?
Hyla Cass: That’s exactly right. Many different strains and they’re bred specifically for different properties. And I think the things we want to cover today are one, the pitfalls. The problems that we’re seeing in our practice and reading about in the literature, the problems with marijuana. And then some of the benefits of marijuana and the benefits of CBD. So those are all separate topics.

Trudy Scott: Okay. Let’s start with the benefits of marijuana.

Hyla Cass: Okay, so years ago I wrote a book called Natural Highs, many years ago. I wrote it with Patrick Holford and I believe it was published in 2002. So that’s a long time ago. And we didn’t have medical marijuana then. It wasn’t legal. And what I wrote about was that it had been passed in the UK, they had a parliamentary commission in the UK. We had a commissioner here, Francis Young, who was a judge, chief judge-commissioner at the DEA. And both of these committees agreed that medical marijuana was good and it should be reclassified. But the DEA in this country and in the UK decided against it at the time.

And so I’ve always been a proponent of medical marijuana because the results were very promising. Things like increasing appetite in people with cancer and AIDS, treating the nausea that comes with cancer and a number of other effects. So I’m not against medical marijuana. So that was way back then. And now it’s become legalized. CBD is legal although there’s still some question and I’m not even going to go into that but there is no THC in CBD or very small amounts, not psychoactive.

The medical marijuana that has become legal is more controversial. It has become legal in several states as we know. You get a medical marijuana card and you can use it or abuse it. And I’m not pulling any punches here because what I’m seeing is people getting marijuana cards and abusing it and I know there are people listening that are going to say she doesn’t know what she’s talking about. She’s just being a killjoy. I don’t want people to have fun and get high. Well I used it and it really helped my cancer, my MS. It does. It really does do all that and I’m not against that.

What I am saying that in many, many people who are prone to having a negative effect from smoking pot – it’s very serious. There are very serious side effects and they are subtle. They’re not as profoundly visible as say meth or coke addiction. So you can literally be lulled into a sense of security. Oh, there’s nothing wrong here. And then you see somebody in their thirties who’s been couch surfing for years because
they’re pursuing their artistic bent, for example, not doing anything and smoking pot all day. And that is not a productive life.

We know stoners. We’ve seen movies about stoners. It’s a real problem. It is really real. And when these stoners recover – when I say recover they stop using. It takes quite a while to get the pot out of their system. When they stop using they say oh my, I just lost 5, 10, 15, 20 years of my life. People who have been smoking, it’s usually guys but sometimes women who have been smoking since they were teenagers. Missed all that opportunity. And I’m a psychiatrist so I’m really aware of this. All that opportunity for emotional development. And they were just stoners for all those years. And they realize they got their mind back, their motivation, their ability to be productive, their ability to relate to others, their interest in others, their interest in themselves.

And when they see the contrast, their families see the contrast it’s really quite miraculous. And you get families – I get families saying oh, wow. I have my son back. I have my daughter back. It’s really remarkable. So that was a very long speech and now I’ll be quiet and let you say something.

_Trudy Scott:_

No that was great and I’m glad you talk about that because that is a pretty profound effect and it’s affecting someone’s life. But there are some other bad effects that we’re going to go into as well where you actually end up being hospitalized or you end up having to get on medication because of the effects. So we’ve got this aspect where you’re sterner and you’re smoking your life away. That’s one big aspect. And then we’ve got the other problems where you can end up with psychosis. But before we go there I just wanted to make sure we got everything covered because you had talked about the benefits of marijuana and I’m glad you mentioned some of the positive benefits.

And I must say something …going back to your comment about this being a very touchy subject, I’ve posted something on Facebook a number of times actually. And whenever I do I get half the people that are totally in favor of it telling me how much it’s helped them. I had one gentleman very passionately telling me how it helped him get off his bipolar medications and it totally changed his life. So I hear other people that have seen the benefits but then at the same time I’ll have half the people telling me all of these terrible horror stories of things that have happened. So there are some people that are more susceptible and I think we just want that awareness there. And the fact that it hadn’t been legal up until recently, we have a lack of research and there’s more research coming out. And a lot of the researchers are saying we need more research, you know. Are we going to talk about some susceptibilities here. Certainly if you’ve got certain gene,
polymorphisms you’re more susceptible to the effects. So I think we just want this awareness to be there and I appreciate you sharing.

But I wanted to go back to the benefits. Were there any specific benefits of CBD that you wanted to mention before we go into some of the psychosis and some of the other problems that we might see.

_Hyla Cass:_

Well sure. CBD you can buy legally. You can get it online. You can get it from reputable companies. The CBD oil which you take orally, as a spray or capsules or just an oil that you measure out and it’s good for nausea and actually for cancer. Not just for nausea from chemotherapy but actually having positive effects on the immune system against tumors. And they’ve done good research, research from Israel. There’s a lot of research from Israel on both marijuana and CBD. They’ve been growing it legally by the government. It’s a very hard to get a medical marijuana card in Israel. Very close monitored. And what’s really good about it is one, the product is grown very cleanly and we’ll talk about when it’s not grown cleanly after this.

And the research has been impeccable. There’s a doctor Raphael Mechoulam at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who’s done some remarkable research over the years on the use of marijuana for many, many things. And yet basically it’s low THC marijuana and he’s won prizes for this. He’s won awards and I’m very impressed. They’ve done cancer research. They’ve done research on mood and emotion, on neurodegenerative disease, anxiety and so on. So there’s a lot of promise here because what CBD does – you wonder well why is it such a panacea. Maybe this is just a placebo effect. But what it does is it’s cannabidiol. It interacts with a cannabinoid, the endocannabinoid system of the body which effects all the neurotransmitters and the immune system. So it’s a mediator so it helps the neurotransmitters to go where they need to go. It helps to reinforce the immune system. So that’s why it’s such a panacea. That’s why it works all over the body.

But it’s not to be confused with THC, the psychoactive part, simply because there are too many pitfalls with the psychoactive product. Now if you’re somebody who’s absolutely not susceptible to the pitfalls that’s another story that I won’t even touch. But the CBD has not been found to have any downside unlike the THC. And since you have all of the upside and none of the downside I know where I’m going to stack my deck here. Because I feel very strongly about young people becoming very heavily addicted.

And not everyone gets addicted. Like not everyone gets addicted to alcohol, to coke, to whatever. There’s people who have tried heroin. Okay, that’s it. Or they’ve had an opiate for a condition, a pain pill,
and then they’re okay. They go off it and they’re good. They’re not addicted. But very often people who have been smoking marijuana for a while when they go off it they go through serious withdrawal – anxiety, insomnia, feeling really very bad. Very much like when we know pictures we’ve seen, movies, we understand what it’s like getting off heroin when people go through withdrawal. Very similar, it really looks similar in appearance. Not everyone does that but common enough. So that’s that.

But then there’s the other part that we’re going to go into and then I will give you a chance to say something. And that is there are many toxic sources of marijuana because it’s often coming from outside of the country. Do you think they grow organic, nice, clean product all over the place? I don’t think so. I don’t think they’re thinking about the end user being kept as healthy as possible. What I know is that there’s a lot of pesticides, a lot of junk being sprayed on these plants to keep them bug free, to keep them looking good. We want to eat organic vegetables but I don’t notice people being as careful about what they’re smoking or if they’re eating pot, the same thing.

So what we have found is serious loads of heavy metals and pesticides in the product and in the individuals. So you get a young person with a developing brain so not only are they addicted and having problems for that reason being unmotivated and not doing well in school and not having friends and kind of dropping out. But they’re now poisoned. Their brain is poisoned. Their body is poisoned and they have to have a formal detox. And there are ways of doing it but it takes time and attention and you have to know that that’s going on or else you’re really lost. You really do lose your brain and boy, that’s the last thing anyone should have is a defective brain, especially when you’ve done it to yourself and that there are remedies.

And before you even talk about remedies let’s talk about prevention. And I’m hoping this is going to reach young people who understand this. And I don’t want to be like this hysterical anti-pot person because I’m not. I support the use of things that are healthy for us. And what we’re finding is it’s not so healthy. So there.

**Trudy Scott:** Excellent. I’ve got two follow on questions and then I’ve got a comment about THC. The first one is the research or doctor from Hebrew University, Dr. Raphael. What is his last name please?

**Hyla Cass:** Mechoulam.

**Trudy Scott:** Can you spell that please?
Hyla Cass: No but I can spell it in Hebrew.

Trudy Scott: Okay.


Trudy Scott: Okay, great. And then with regards to the CBD which has these benefits. Obviously it doesn’t contain the THC which is the psychoactive component then it doesn’t have the downsides. How is that consumed? I’ve seen it as CBD oil so is that consumed orally?

Hyla Cass: It’s oral, yes.

Trudy Scott: Okay. Orally.

Hyla Cass: Yes. I mentioned that it comes in an oil or sprays. Very often there’s a spray or in a capsule.

Trudy Scott: Okay.

Hyla Cass: But it’s encapsulated oil.

Trudy Scott: Okay. And then going back to the whole THC aspect and this is something that I know you’ll get but I just want to make sure that everyone listening gets this. You know we’re talking about something, use the CBD but stay away from the THC certainly until you know if you’re susceptible or not. But the second thing is even if you know something is problematic if you have the need to self-medicate to feel normal that’s a problem. And this is where balancing brain chemistry comes in, the work that Dr. Cass does, the work that I do with the amino acids. So if you’re feeling like you need that high from the THC then it’s a moment to step back and say well why do I need that high? Why do I need to feel good? Why am I self-medicating? And we self-medicate with drugs, we self-medicate with sugar or caffeine or with gluten or whatever it is. We use these drugs, they’re drugs, to make us feel good. So that’s something that I think we really need to clarify here don’t you think Dr. Cass?

Hyla Cass: Oh totally. I mean I do the same thing when people are saying but I need my sugar. I need a treat. And I’ll say well you need a treat because your poor middle brain is feeling deprived. And we have better ways of restoring balance so you’re not craving. And so very often people that are craving pot really have – and this is interesting – really have a fatty acid deficiency. So one of the things that I do when I’m treating these young people is put them on high fat diets with salmon, avocado, extra capsules 2 grams a day of fish oil, borage oil
which is omega 6 fatty acids. So you’ve got the omega 3, the EPA and DHA and the omega 6 oils. And make sure you have organic butter.

And on top of that are these – and who I’m seeing are young people in their 20s and their parents bring them in kind of desperate. But they need to be eating a diet that has fat and protein. So they need to really increase what they’re eating and the quality of what they’re eating because the more they’re eating junk food to deal – as you’re saying people tend to go for the junk food when they’re feeling bad, the junk food or the pot. I’m saying once they have the right amount of fat and protein in their brain they’re much less likely to be craving. And I see this over and over again.

I had one young man come in and he’d been vegetarian and he was thin and smoking, really smoking a lot of pot. His mother was feeling pretty desperate. He was trying to stop and having a difficult time of it. So what was really cool was that there was a Whole Foods right near my office. So I suggested they go over there for lunch and that they get some salmon and some avocados and I’d given him some supplements. I’d given him my Brain Cell Support that has phosphatidylserine and phosphatidylcholine that also help with the cell membrane. And I’d given him my Brain Recovery AM and PM that had the amino acids in it as well as some other things that help with sugar cravings. So I really stacked the deck by giving him my supplements. And then he had to have food because food is really the basic thing you need and supplements are supplements.

So mom took him to Whole Foods that has this restaurant. This is a commercial for Whole Foods I guess, isn’t it? So I got the report back the next day. She said it was profound. She said he had been vegetarian and this was the first time he had eaten fish in quite a long time. I knew he was probably deficient in carnitine and B12 as well. I hadn’t tested him yet. So he went and ate. She said he ate salmon and avocado and a bunch of stuff. I psyched him up. I kind of made him do it. And it was just down the street. He didn’t have a chance to change his mind. He didn’t know what hit him. So he ate all that and she said oh boy, he started to come back. Very interesting. He got happier, more present just from eating that just immediately.

And what happens when you eat the good fats is it starts to heal the brain cells that are filled unfortunately with marijuana. You know it can take up to three months to get it out but the truth is it can take much longer. People have had really intense sauna treatments and haven’t smoked in many years will be in intensive sauna treatment, like maybe sauna and niacin and they start to smell the pot in the sauna. That funky smell.
Trudy Scott: How many years later?

Hyla Cass: Years and years and years later. It’s supposed to be out in a few weeks or a few months but it can really hang around, especially if you haven’t been eating well.

Trudy Scott: I love that story. The power of food. How amazing is that. And I’m glad you mentioned a vegetarian diet. It’s so problematic we just don’t have the raw materials to make brain chemicals.

Hyla Cass: Oh my god, eggs. You’ve got to have eggs. Eggs will give you choline and protein and all these different things. Because what are you doing? You’re making a little chicky. I mean some people are like averse to this. I don’t want to eat an incipient chicky. Well I’m saying it’s really good nutrition. So think about it. And again if somebody really believes in being vegetarian or vegan that’s what they want to do. But then you have to do a lot of other things to make sure you’re getting the right nutrition. It’s just a lot easier to get proper nutrition to feed the brain when you’re non-vegetarian. And maybe you can speak to that a little bit more Trudy.

Trudy Scott: I totally agree with you and it is so interesting. In just about every single interview for the Anxiety Summit vegetarianism comes up. A speaker will say they’ve been a vegetarian or I’ll mention that I was and that was part of my anxiety. I’m pretty sure that was a big factor. And I see it with so many of my clients. So I think we just need to let people know that it’s very common to see mood issues and addiction issues in susceptible people who are eating a vegetarian diet. And you do need to be cognizant of low iron and low zinc and low B12 if you are not eating a healthy vegetarian diet. And even if you’re eating a healthy vegetarian diet the B12 is pretty much always a factor. And then the fatty acids that you’ve just talked about can be very commonly deficient. So I support you all the way and I’m so glad you brought this up because it’s important that people be aware of this. And what wonderful results. That’s just amazing.

Hyla Cass: Yes. And carnitine because carnitine helps fatty acids get into the brain cell and that’s very important. I mean our brain runs on fat. Our cell membrane runs on fat. That’s where we make the neurotransmitters. And if we don’t have the environment, for example, the good fats in which to make the neurotransmitters we’re not going to be making serotonin, dopamine, acetylcholine and so on. So we’re going to be depressed and stupid.

Trudy Scott: Absolutely.
Hyla Cass: And obviously anxious. You need your neurotransmitters and unfortunately what pot does is it reduces all the neurotransmitters. So you can become depressed, anxious, have poor memory and unmotivated because of the lack of dopamine. So it’s a multifactorial issue here and pot is a difficult one when you’re not supplementing. I don’t know how people get off it not supplementing with the appropriate food and nutrients.

Trudy Scott: Excellent. I’m glad you brought that up and the amino acids are so valuable and so are the other nutrients you’ve mentioned. And then getting on a real whole foods diet with good quality protein and of course me talking about protein and fats. Obviously the healthy fats. It needs to be grass fed red meat, wild salmon and sardines and grass fed butter and all the healthy foods. You talked about pesticides on the pot. We want to make sure we’ve got healthy foods as well. So I think that goes without saying but just in case you’ve got some newbies here listening we want to just clarify that.

I was going back to this example that you gave of this young gentleman and he was fortunate. He had a very big turnaround and he hadn’t been disabled by the use of pot. But some of the areas that are very profound in terms of how disabling it can be is the fact that in certain susceptible individuals marijuana use can actually trigger schizophrenia and psychosis. And there’s a number of studies supporting this and it’s not a high number but someone gets affected by this it’s serious. It’s really, really serious.

Hyla Cass: Oh yes and I have seen this as well. I have absolutely seen somebody without much of a history in the family of schizophrenia or bipolar illness but they’ve really tipped the balance. Or some of them may have a history but if they hadn’t smoked pot nothing would have happened. But this really does tip the balance in terms of when you don’t have the essential fatty acids and you don’t have these, you know, neurotransmitter precursors you can become psychotic. And the treatment there is not to medicate. I mean it’s kind of ridiculous isn’t it when you think of it. You’re psychotic because you don’t have nutrients. In fact your brain is kind of toxic. And then you go ahead and give a drug which is causing further toxicity to the brain. I’m a psychiatrist. I can prescribe antipsychotic meds. I don’t like to. You read Robert Whitaker’s Anatomy of an Epidemic or his website Mad in America and you’ll see about the dangers of the antipsychotic medications. I am not a big fan unless it’s an acute situation.

But let’s go under the hood. Let’s treat the underlying disturbance. So to take somebody who is schizophrenic and put them on medication is really not indicated. And these people will get much better when they
are eating right, taking supplements, being active, exercising, being in fresh air, being in nature, having a full healing program. So my case rests there.

Trudy Scott: Okay. And unfortunately Dr. Cass – I’ve spoken to moms who contacted me because their son is anxious and it turns out that the son a few years before had a psychotic break. And it was year later that they connected it to the marijuana use. And it’s not many cases that I’ve come across. It’s people that have contacted me or commented on Facebook or on the blog but I’ve heard a lot of moms say that whenever there’s a situation of psychosis in a young individual, young male like early 20s they can always tie it back to marijuana use. So there are definitely susceptible individuals and I think when it happens they don’t realize that it was the marijuana so they go and medicate because they’re trying to help their child. So I think the more awareness of this the better. So if suddenly your kid ends up in trouble you can question was marijuana a factor. So you can be aware of it. I think that’s really important. And I think the research is all finding that it’s the late teen years that seem to be really bad in terms of – and certainly more so in males. Is that what you are aware of?

Hyla Cass: That’s exactly what I’m seeing. However, you’re saying that the parents should realize that it’s due to pot smoking and not medicate. But that’s not what happens. What happens is they will take their son to a psychiatrist and the psychiatrist may know that there’s marijuana involved and they will medicate. Because to them it’s not a matter of oh, it’s the marijuana, let’s treat nutritionally. They haven’t a clue. I mean I hope there are psychiatrists and physicians listening. I pray that there are. Anyone listening pass this on to doctors that you know to educate them about this really serious problem. Over and over again in addiction facilities, inpatient facilities, outpatient facilities I see people on all kinds of medications being detoxed from all kinds of drugs, substances of abuse which is so not the way to go.

The way to treat addiction is yes, stop the substance but you don’t have to use medication. If you use nutrition – good foods, nutritional supplements. I’ve also been incorporating intravenous NAD on occasion. That works very quickly to help restore the mitochondria because ultimately there’s a mitochondrial issue here and those are the little powerhouses in each cell. And they’re damaged by all kinds of substances of abuse and damaged by the drugs, by the medications, by the prescriptions. So I feel really saddened when I see this when I go into an addiction treatment facility when I’ve gone sometimes to lecture and these people are in a fog because they’re medicated and they don’t need to be.
And then there are other facilities that are using nutritional supplements and the people are much brighter, much happier and they get better faster. And then they have a pathway to go on for the rest of their life as opposed to being say on medication for the rest of their life. So substituting one addiction for another. So I have to emphasize here as you do, let’s treat naturally because we’re going to the root cause. We’re going to – first of all we’re detoxing and we’re also replacing what was missing in the first place that likely led them to the substance. And sometimes people start smoking pot or using whatever because of peer pressure and it wasn’t because they just had a deficiency. But because of their own genetics it went on to become addicted. And so we clean that up and I really applaud you for your contribution here as well.

**Trudy Scott:** Well thank you. And thanks for clarifying that because I wasn’t thinking that the doctors would be aware that it was triggered by the marijuana and yet still medicate. I just didn’t think that but clearly it’s an issue. And I’m glad you mentioned the genetics because I did find one study when I was getting ready for this interview where they shared that the COMT polymorphism seems to play a bigger role in the use of marijuana and adolescent psychosis. So maybe as more research comes out we’re going to find that there are more genes that make us more susceptible and just know that this is the reason why it happened and hopefully prevent it which would be a good thing.

**Hyla Cass:** Yes the COMT issue is not that uncommon and it means that you’re not breaking down your neurotransmitters. And in psychosis very often there’s an excess of dopamine. But even so genetics is much more complicated than that. I know people with COMT genes where this doesn’t happen. However, often there’s also a difficulty with methylation. So if you have a methylation issue there are two things. You’re unable to detoxify anything. You’re not detoxifying the substances that you’re smoking or ingesting. And you’re not able to make neurotransmitters properly. So if you’re a poor methylator that’s another whole issue of genetics that you’ve talked about on other programs so I won’t emphasize it here. But that’s something else to look at.

**Trudy Scott:** Good point, absolutely. And we can’t just isolate one gene like the COMT because we can have a myriad of combinations of different gene polymorphisms. And even if we do have the polymorphism we don’t know if it’s expressing and causing a problem. But I’m glad you mentioned the MTHFR [methylation] gene here because that’s a very common, we certainly see that with people with neurotransmitter issues. And that might be one of the reasons why they feel they have
the need to use the pot to self-medicate with. So it’s all these little subtleties that we have to put together.

_Hyla Cass:_ You know people who have COMT and MAOA which means they’re not breaking down the neurotransmitters properly in a way you say well that’s great. I’m not breaking down my neurotransmitters. I have more. But an imbalance occurs and what happens is these people tend to be rather driven and quite successful. Tap a successful person and you may find homozygous for COMT and for MAOA. And it’s kind of a good thing so we can’t say oh, that’s a bad thing. You could end up being a pot addict. Not at all. I mean tap a lot of successful people and you’re going to find that. But there are other mitigating factors so genetics is not cut and dry but it does give us some sort of a roadmap and we’re able to see where the pitfalls might be and anticipate them and treat them preventively so we’re not having to express those genetic qualities by what we do to change the genetic expression.

_Trudy Scott:_ Excellent. Thank you for that clarification. So we talked earlier about someone smoking their life away and pot use. The other big issue that we see…

_Hyla Cass:_ That’s quite a picture.

_Trudy Scott:_ The other big issue that we see is cognitive problems. And I spoke with a number of people when I worked in Julia Ross’s clinic and they were so disabled by the pot use that they couldn’t even follow directions in terms of starting to eat real foods and going shopping and taking supplements. So cognitive function is a very big issue and I know there’s a researcher Dr. Michael Compton who’s written a book on marijuana and mental health. And his issue is with pot use and poor school performance and school dropouts. And he says this is a big problem.

_Hyla Cass:_ Oh terrible. It’s very serious and what’s really sad, this is terribly sad. In susceptible individuals, especially if they’ve ingested toxic material they don’t get their brain back. And Julia tells a story of a young man who took a break for a year or six months from his Ph.D. program when he came back — and in that interim he was having a good this is 20 years ago when the pot wasn’t as strong as it is now. It’s so strong now. It’s not your parent’s pot. I’m talking to the younger people now because my generation which is the Boomers are the ones who discovered pot.

And now the kids are smoking much, much stronger stuff and the parents are being a little permissive and it’s oh, it’s just pot. Oh no, you try it. Don’t try it but it’s really serious. So getting back to this
story from some of them smoking it thinking it’s harmless and it isn’t. So this young man took this gap year or gap six months, came back to complete his Ph.D. program, couldn’t do it. He had been brilliant. He had been able to calculate, think abstractly. It was in math. He came back and had lost it. Now I don’t know if he could have rebuilt it with diet and nutrition or if he needed detoxing. We don’t know because I don’t have details about the case. But that is heartbreaking and this is – I’ve seen this over and over again. I saw this a lot in the old days when people used to tune in, turn on, drop out using all kinds of substances. And they never got their brain back. And these are kids who were really smart. They were in college doing well until they discovered pot. And then just drifted into this oblivion that they never quite got out of. And that’s wasted lives. Very, very sad.

You can say well people choose to do it. No you don’t choose to do it. You start doing it and it chooses you. And you become the victim of this addiction and you really don’t have a lot of control over it in a way. And that’s not what I say. I say it’s not your fault that you’re addicted. But it’s your responsibility to get yourself the heck out of it. That’s what I say and you can quote me.

Trudy Scott: And that’s a good point. That is to recognize that it’s a problem and then get that help. I think the important thing here is to realize that going through a lot of the conventional treatment centers are not going to give you the solution that you need. You need to be getting on a real foods diet and using the aminos and the nutrients that Dr. Cass has talked about here because you need to restore your brain chemistry and the nutritional deficiencies that have led you to want that in the first place.

Hyla Cass: Well I want to mention something else. Dabs and vaping. Do you know about dabs?

Trudy Scott: Tell me about dabs.

Hyla Cass: Dabs is pot that’s mixed with butane and other chemicals to make it stronger and to make it more acceptable. And the vaporizer when you vape you’re using butane as lighter fluid. You know do you really want to inhale lighter fluid? I mean it’s highly toxic. It’s going to your brain. Your brain is lipophilic. Your brain loves fat. Fat things that are fat soluble I should say because your brain cells are made out of fat. You absorb the butane and it’s toxic. And you’re killing brain cells. You’re killing the mitochondria, the powerhouses of the cell, the things that make the brain cells operate. So let me say vaping is not – I don’t recommend vaping at all. I think it’s a poor replacement. You don’t want to vape. You don’t want to use dabs. I mean the kids are using
terrible stuff. They’re getting it on the street. They don’t know what else is in it. So much pot has been analyzed to have all kinds of other drugs in it. People have had very, very bad, very permanent reactions including permanent brain damage, permanent paralysis. This was from pot that came out some years ago that killed the people’s basal ganglia so that they had permanent Parkinsonism. These are young people. So tragic, really tragic. So it’s not to be taken lightly. People say oh, it’s just pot. When you’re doing something you need to look at the whole picture. You need to really know what you’re doing. Go into it forewarned.

So when you say well it’s my choice to smoke. Yes it’s your choice but do it really in an educated way. There are pesticides and there are herbicides. Do I have a susceptibility to this genetically? What kind of things run in my family? What kind of disorders run in my family? Is it worthwhile to do this? What am I getting myself into? Are there other ways to go? Are, people using pot to relax - maybe you need some GABA or Theanine. I have a product called Calm that’s great and a lot of people that had been smoking pot or drinking alcohol to their detriment switched to my Calm product which has Theanine and GABA in it and again just did really much better because it was restoring what you need.

So just don’t fool yourself into thinking oh it’s good for me. I like it. It makes me feel good. Look at the whole picture. You have a responsibility to yourself, your brain, the people who care about you to do the best for yourself. And that’s all I ask. Really treat yourself really, really well. Treat your brain extremely well. It’s the only brain you have. And once you ruin it, it’s very, very hard to bring it back. And you’re taking big risks. So be forewarned. Be forearmed. Do some reading. Do some listening. We’re giving references. I think you’ll have something on your website as well. And there’s a discussion on your Facebook page.

*Trudy Scott:* I’ll share that as well. And I love that: it’s the only brain you have. You need to look after it. And I glad you mentioned GABA and that’s just wonderful that you saw such great results and I’m sure you see that all the time. Those calming amino acids are just wonderful. I use them in my practice and they’re just incredible.

And this brings me to the next topic which is anxiety. So some people will use marijuana to help relieve anxiety and others will feel more anxious using it. And I wanted to share this since it is an anxiety summit. They found that individuals with social anxiety are seven times more likely to meet the criteria for cannabis use disorders.
And what they’ve found is that people with social anxiety will often use it before they go into social settings so they can feel more sociable and less anxious when they enter social settings. And this is a study done this year in March 2016. So we are seeing more research coming out and there was another study on anxiety that looked again at one of the genes. And this was the serotonin transporter gene and they found that people who had the serotonin and transporter gene were more vulnerable to the effects of anxiety from marijuana or cannabis.

And we should probably just clarify some people call it cannabis and some call it marijuana. So there are some people that will use marijuana or cannabis and they can feel more anxious. So if you’re that person, if you’re feeling anxious and you’re not getting results definitely consider the effects of the marijuana.

Hyla Cass: Yes. It can be subtle. As you were saying you don’t realize that that’s what your problem is due to and it is actually causing your anxiety.

Trudy Scott: A lot of people won’t even talk about it. They won’t even share so if you’re a practitioner working with anxious individuals or addicted individuals you need to ask the question. It needs to be on your intake form so you are asking it because often people won’t volunteer it unless you actually ask. So I think that’s an important thing to think about.

Hyla Cass: Something else is I think it’s important to talk about the work that we do in helping people get off of addictive substances such as marijuana by using amino acids and essential fatty acids and good food because it’s – I don’t know how people do it otherwise. How they white knuckle it. And I guess that’s why the medication is called in, the heavy artillery is called in. But we don’t need heavy artillery. We need replacement and we’ve both seen this so many times that when you replace what’s missing the addiction really becomes so much easier to handle and it becomes so much easier to get off of the marijuana or the alcohol or whatever it is.

Trudy Scott: Excellent. And I’m glad you said that. We don’t need to white knuckle it. So let’s talk about some of the nutrients – we’ve mentioned a few in passing but let’s just talk about individual ones. So, for example, if you are anxious and you’re using marijuana to try and calm down let’s talk about some of the aminos that could help with that and again helping you quit the marijuana and at the same time not leaving you feeling anxious again.

Hyla Cass: Right. I start people with kind of a base product that contains a lot of different things. It’s kind of easier and when people are addicted they’re not thinking too well. So I put together this Brain Recovery
AM and PM that has a multivitamin. It has blood sugar addiction reducing cravings products like alpha lipoic acid and glutamine. As well it has GABAergic products like Theanine, 5-HTP and tyrosine. So we’re really covering the whole gamut because with pot smoking you’re usually low in everything. You’re usually low in serotonin, dopamine, acetylcholine and GABA. Dopamine, serotonin, GABA and acetylcholine. And essential fatty acids. So you really want to take all of those.

I use that as a base because it also has the multivitamin that has the co-factors in it. So in addition to a really good organic diet because you sure don’t need any more toxins in your body, you do that as a basis and then I will add in the fish oil, borage oil. And then on top of that I’ll use phosphatidylcholine and phosphatidylserine which I have in my Brain Cell Support Plus because it supports the brain cells. So that’s kind of an initial package. But as you know sometimes and very often people need more 5-HTP. They need more tyrosine or more GABAergic things like GABA or Theanine. And in that case you have your base. You’re taking somewhere between five and seven for breakfast and five to seven capsules of the PM for dinner.

Then you can augment and that’s where – actually on my website I discuss this. I also cover it in my book The Addicted Brain and How to Break Free. There’s a guideline for people because you can’t really do it without having some sort of map and that’s what we’re talking about. We’ve been creating a map here. How to determine what’s going on, what you’re low in and what to do about it. So you can do a lot of this yourself. And it helps also to see a professional if that’s available if that’s something you want to do. But there’s a lot you can do on your own.

Trudy Scott: That’s excellent. And I like that you’ve got a base product, set of products. Because often when there is pot addiction we talked about these cognitive issues and I shared the story of the woman that couldn’t even function. So having a baseline of supplements is good because you can use that to start with and then you could augment if you need it, if you needed more of one or the other nutrients. So I like that idea a lot. That sounds great.

Hyla Cass: Yes, on my website cassmd.com under the Brain Recovery AM and PM there’s a whole program actually. It really explains if this is going on than do this. If this is going on do this. Then there’s my free e-book that you can download from my website. Either sign up your name and your email and you can get this free e-book called Reclaim Your Brain which talks about the different amino acids. And then there’s my Addicted Brain and How to Break Free.
I really supply a lot of literature and I love your book. Your anxiety book *The Antianxiety Food Solution* is just awesome and I turn a lot of people on to it. So I think between your book and *My Addicted Brain and How to Break Free* and my *Reclaim Your Brain* people have a very good start on what they can do on their own.

**Trudy Scott:** They absolutely do. And I’m a big fan of books and reading and being educated. I was just interviewed on a podcast earlier this week and the woman said to me do people need to work with a practitioner or can they figure this out on their own. And I said well, a lot of people can figure it out on their own but be informed, be educated. So read these books, know what’s going on. Don’t just pick up oh Dr. Cass talked about Theanine or she talked about 5-HTP and I’m going to rush out and get it. Read up, be informed, be educated. And then if you find that you need help then work with a practitioner on this. Balancing the brain chemistry is something that I do and I know you do an amazing job with it as well. And it’s so powerful. It’s just such a huge part of both of our practices and you can get resolution by eating real food and balancing those neurotransmitters and balancing other deficiencies. That’s very, very powerful.

And I’ll be talking more about some of the other amino acids in another interview on the summit and we’ve got Dr. Biongiorno who is going to be talking more about serotonin. So we’ll be covering some of the other neurotransmitters in some of the other interviews because this interview focused primarily on marijuana use and some of the concerns and some of the benefits of CBD.

And the other one I wanted to mention is your very first interview on season 1 of *The Anxiety Summit*. We talked specifically about addiction and amino acids. So that would be a good one for folks to go back and listen to as well.

**Hyla Cass:** Yes.

**Trudy Scott:** Excellent. Any final words of wisdom or anything that we missed out? You know what we didn’t talk about that we were going to talk about and I would like to just quickly touch on it is the dangers of smoking. You mentioned that it’s actually worse than tobacco if you’re smoking pot.

**Hyla Cass:** Yes. It can be very, very irritating. It’s very concentrated and what people notice very early on is a sore throat. And you can actually develop throat cancer from the chronic irritation. Here we are trying to promote a healthy lifestyle and then smoking anything is just not good
for you. So why anybody would want to allow all that smoke to go into your lungs and again affect your mitochondria and affect your ability to carry oxygen not a good idea.

By the way I just thought of a couple of other books that you can look at besides The Addicted Brain and How to Break Free which tells you how to do it. There’s a nice CBD book by Sally Schutz and Bayne Boyes called The Anti-Aging Miracles of Hemp-Derived CBD Oil. But it’s probably easier to just remember Sally Schutz, S – C – H – U – T – Z, M.D. It’s got a very nice summary of CBD.

And then another book, it’s out now. It’s in the middle of being revised. I’m actually helping to revise it and it’s called True Bud that talks about toxic marijuana syndrome which is all the toxicity that I’ve been discussing about the butane, the pesticides, the herbicides. All the heavy metals that they’re finding. And Scott did a study on kids at this addiction treatment center and found many of them were loaded with toxins and they had to be detoxed. So it wasn’t just the usual detox that you have when you detoxing from a drug at a detox center. You get off of marijuana, that’s what detox means. But this means real detox. Real biochemical detox where you’re taking the heavy metals and the chemicals out of the body. And you have to do that in order to get your brain back. So there’s a lot of resources.

Trudy Scott: Thank you for sharing that. So True Bud. Who’s the author of that one?

Hyla Cass: Scott Gilett.

Trudy Scott: And then the anti-aging book. What is the spelling of that author?


Trudy Scott: Okay, great.


Trudy Scott: Okay, great. We’ll make sure those are listed with the speaker blog together with your great resources. And I’ll make sure we’ve got a link so people can get your free e-book as well which is a great resource and I encourage people to get The Addicted Brain and How to Break Free. It’s an excellent book. Nice and concise and to the point.

Hyla Cass: Thank you.

Trudy Scott: It’s really, really great.
Hyla Cass: Yes, I think it’s about 100 pages which makes it kind of easier to read.

Trudy Scott: Yes, for people who may have some cognitive issues. Okay, any final words of wisdom for us?

Hyla Cass: Oh my. I think I’ve said a lot. I really appreciate the opportunity and I will say again look before you leap. Be really careful what you put in your body. Protect your brain and protect your body and just take good care. And I want to thank you,

Trudy Scott: Thank you. Thank you very much for joining us. It’s always a pleasure to interview you and you’re always a wealth of information. I appreciate your expertise on this topic because I know it’s a hot topic and it’s sensitive and we deliberated about how we would deliver it so we could make sure it was a fair delivery and I think we’ve done a really good job. Hopefully the critics aren’t going to be too critical.

Hyla Cass: We’ll hear about it.

Trudy Scott: Hopefully it will at least have piqued some interest and some possible concerns. I think the big thing is education and being aware and that’s what you’re trying to do here. And trying to help people and trying to not let people get into the bad situations that we’ve seen some of them in. So wonderful, wonderful to have you here again and thank you very much for joining us. Thank you everyone for joining us on another fabulous interview on The Anxiety Summit Season 4. Do tune into other great interviews on the summit. This is Trudy Scott signing off.


Dr. Hyla Cass, M.D. board-certified in psychiatry and integrative medicine, author of The Addicted Brain and How to Break Free

Dr. Hyla Cass is a nationally acclaimed physician, board-certified in psychiatry and neurology, as well as in integrative and holistic medicine. She is one of the country’s foremost authors and experts on the subject of integrative medicine, combining the best
of leading-edge natural medicine with modern science in her clinical practice of 30 years, writings, lectures, and nationwide media appearances.

She is recognized for helping people to come off both psychiatric medication and substances of abuse with the use of targeting nutritional supplements, including her own unique formulations. They also serve to enhance mind, mood, energy and memory, naturally.

Quoted widely in newspapers and magazines, including the Los Angeles Times, The Toronto Star, Cosmopolitan, Newsweek, and People Magazine, she also appears regularly on radio and television, on shows such as The Dr. Oz Show, The View, E! Entertainment, and MSNBC.

She is the author of several popular books including User’s Guide to Herbal Remedies, St. John’s Wort: Nature’s Blues Buster, Natural Highs, Supplement Your Prescription: What Your Doctor Doesn’t Know About Nutrition, 8 Weeks to Vibrant Health, and The Addicted Brain and How to Break Free. See her website for more information cassmd.com

**Trudy Scott**, CN, host of The Anxiety Summit, Food Mood expert and author of *The Antianxiety Food Solution*

Food Mood Expert Trudy Scott is a certified nutritionist on a mission to educate and empower anxious individuals worldwide about natural solutions for anxiety, stress and emotional eating. Trudy serves as a catalyst in bringing about life enhancing transformations that start with the healing powers of eating real whole food, using individually targeted supplementation and making simple lifestyle changes. She works primarily with women but the information she offers works equally well for men and children.

Trudy also presents nationally to nutrition and mental health professionals on food and mood, sharing all the recent research and how-to steps so they too can educate and empower their clients and patients.

Trudy is past president of the National Association of Nutrition Professionals. She was recipient of the 2012 Impact Award and currently serves as a Special Advisor to the Board of Directors. Trudy is a member of Alliance for Addiction Solutions and Anxiety
and Depression Association of America. She was a nominee for the 2015 Scattergood Innovation Award and is a faculty advisor at Hawthorn University.

Trudy is the author of *The Antianxiety Food Solution: How the Foods You Eat Can Help You Calm Your Anxious Mind, Improve Your Mood and End Cravings* (New Harbinger 2011). She is also the host of the wildly popular *Anxiety Summit*, a virtual event where she interviews experts on nutritional solutions for anxiety.

Trudy is passionate about sharing the powerful food mood connection because she experienced the results first-hand, finding complete resolution of her anxiety and panic attacks.

The information provided in The Anxiety Summit via the interviews, the blog posts, the website, the audio files and transcripts, the comments and all other means is for informational and educational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for advice from your physician or other health care professional. You should consult with a healthcare professional before starting any diet, exercise, or supplementation program, before taking or stopping any medication, or if you have or suspect you may have a health problem.