Safe Spliffs

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Many HIVers roll out the weed to whack nausea and pain—and kick-start their appetites. But does pot play well with HAART? A short-term study in the August 2003 *Annals of Internal Medicine* says yes.

Sixty-two protease-taking HIVers indulged in spliffs, dronabinol (Marinol) or placebos at the University of California San Francisco's Positive Health Program. After three weeks, marijuana- and Marinol-users' viral loads and antiretroviral levels held steady, and CD4 counts actually rose. What's more, the munchies helped pack on the pounds.

Knowing that pot doesn't seem to *hurt* HAART paves the way for studies (three are in process) to see if it *helps* the meds do their job, says study author Donald Abrams, MD.

Meanwhile, the Netherlands has become the world's first country to let docs prescribe cannabis to HIVers with chronic pain, nausea or appetite loss. Pressure from patients and courts also has Canada hopping aboard the medical Mary Jane train, allowing weed to those in need.

For more on pot studies at UCSF, check out the Center for Medical Cannabis Research at www.cmcr.ucsd.edu. And if getting high interferes with your adherence, you might want to ignore the nice studies and ditch the dope.

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