

A Success Story - Jodie

Chronic migraine patient Jodie transformed from being in constant, debilitating pain to discovering a healthier, happier life. Read more about her wellness journey, how GrowWise was a part of it and discover her passionate dedication to helping other migraine sufferers find empowerment and relief.

RELIEF

Relief is a word that carries a lot of weight. To some, it invokes feelings of comfort... a welcome respite from the difficulties that consume us. To others, it represents something we struggle, fight, hope and wish for every minute of every day of our lives with varying degrees of success. It is a word that can bring tears to our eyes out of deep anguish or sheer joy.

Patients with chronic illness often spend years in pursuit of diagnosis, answers, treatment and *relief*. I am willing to bet that many of you reading this right now have a story that spans several years, involving countless doctors and a list of treatments and medications that haven't done much except leave you exhausted and cynical.

Some of us have found it, that elusive relief. But how long did it last? Were you able to let yourself enjoy it? Or were you waiting for the other shoe to drop? The relief never seems to last. When it's within your grasp though, you are enabled to drop the "functional human being" facade and actually *become* one.

For an ever-growing number of patients (myself included), it is medical cannabis that is allowing us to achieve more moments as a well-adjusted, high functioning, semi-normal human being.

I am a chronic migraine patient, which by definition means I experience more than 15 migraines per month. At my worst, I had intractable migraine for 29 days out of a month. It was a living nightmare. I've had migraines since age 11, though at that time they were considered "episodic" and I struggled with only four to five a year. Though migraines were an awful thing to deal with at that age, I learned to manage them. It wasn't until my condition turned chronic at age 29 that I realized just how debilitating migraines could really be.

For chronic migraine or headache patients, it is not always the level of pain that makes it debilitating, but the fact that the pain is *unrelenting*. It is a demon that never gives you peace. Headache pain is just one symptom of migraine. It affects every part of our lives... memory, mood, concentration, speech, sleep, libido, anxiety depression, work, family, social life. It just goes on and on. Can't eat or drink without analyzing everything on my plate – triggers everywhere. Hot weather and cold weather are both equally triggering. Anticipating an occasion like a wedding or vacation? Anxiety triggered migraine. It is my

whole life and a fulltime job.

When I first felt relief, *true* relief from this pain my life has become, I cried tears of pure joy. It was short lived. Yet it was enough to reinstate hope, which is something pain patients need desperately. There is an extremely high suicide rate amongst migraine patients and I would be lying if I told you I haven't had days that dark. Mental health goes down the drain pretty quickly when you want to crack your own skull open. I would not have made it this far without my family.

My situation has improved greatly over the last few years, and it is because I have learned to take a larger role in my own healthcare. I have more control, initiative, and rely less on other people to steer my progress. It took hitting rock bottom, but I overhauled my entire lifestyle, diet and method of treatment. I needed to free myself from the vicious cycle of rebound migraine. In order to start, I needed to temporarily stop medicating with triptans and opioids. I was only able to do this by replacing them with medical cannabis. With help from GrowWise Health and their team of educators, I became a legal cannabis patient and began experimenting with flower, vaping and CBD oil. I began keeping track of how everything affected my head pain. I felt empowered. I also "came out" of the cannabis closet to my family and co-workers! Destigmatizing led to advocating, and I was so excited to help others like me.

There was a profound shift in my wellbeing when I began engaging in online support communities. Locally, there were no migraine support groups to be found. I asked the biggest headache specialist in Canada if there was a support group I could join. Crickets. How is this possible? Migraine is ranked the 8th most disabling disease in the world, but it doesn't merit its own support group?

I spent a few years thoroughly engaged in various Facebook groups. There were several just for chronic migraine patients! I even found a group for those who follow the same migraine diet I do! In these groups, I learned about treatments that were being used in different countries, medications that my doctor had never mentioned, found others that could explain some of my strange symptoms... any question I had, I could ask and get *empathetic* responses. There were tens of thousands of people like me, when I had been struggling for years to find someone who would understand what I was going through.

It was a complete game changer for me. Not only were these kind people helping *me*, but it gave me an opportunity to help others and share what I had learned during my long struggle. The time I spent in those online communities were invaluable. The power in not feeling alone anymore is profound. I had a newfound passion for treating my migraines with cannabis though, and there was a void to be filled. These groups were censoring discussions about cannabis despite growing curiosity, and there was no destination online to find research articles and educational material about cannabis specific to migraines and headaches. I was eager to share my findings. MigraineBuds was born!

We currently exist as the very same type of community that proved so helpful to me – a Facebook discussion group. You can find us by searching “MigraineBuds Chat” in the Facebook search bar. We are 1700 patients strong, with an international membership that represents North and South America, UK, Australia, India and beyond! Together we discuss the basics of cannabis use including its various forms as well as methods of administration. We discuss how to become a legal patient, the difference in strains and dosages for migraine, cannabinoids ratios, homemade trigger-free edibles and any other topic or question that people have on their mind! CBD is a popular subject, and members are curious to know which LP’s have the most effective CBD products for migraines. We focus on education, sharing up to date information on research studies and highly relevant topics like possible medication interactions and the potential for cannabis contributing to rebound/medication overuse headache. With regards to this last point we have learned that no data currently exists, so I have begun advocating for this very study to be conducted in Canada with the help of two brilliant minds from the Canadian Institute for Medical Advancement.

Many of our members are migraine patients who have nearly lost hope. Treatment after treatment has failed them and they are at the end of their rope. Medical cannabis represents an option many have not tried... buried under the “street drug” stigma, many still have trouble wrapping their minds around its medical benefits. Meanwhile we are being treated like drug seekers or addicts for taking opioids when we are in great amounts of pain. So much judgement piled on a group of patients who are just looking for *relief*.

Migraine brothers and sisters, there are still options out there for you to try. And if you try a form of cannabis that does not help, keep trying. The options are endless and not every cannabis strain, oil or CBD product will work for you. No two are the same. It takes a fair amount of trial and error but if you are patient with yourself and the process, you will likely find yourself a few more tools for your battle kit. Will it cure your migraines? Likely not. But it will help you through some very tough days.

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