

For people with serious health problems such as Multiple Sclerosis the decision cannot come soon enough.
Health writer KATE LAHIVE reports.

TODAY Home Secretary David Blunkett was unveiling the biggest shift in drugs policy for 30 years by confirming cannabis will be effectively decriminalised.

My daily 'fix' has helped me

MS sufferer backs easing of drugs law

FIFTEEN years ago Daniel was given the devastating news that he had multiple sclerosis and was warned that within five years he would be in a wheelchair.

Fortunately, that prediction has not come true and the 40-year-old Sheffield businessman and father enjoys a reasonably good quality of life.

He believes his health has benefited over the years from yoga, meditation - and a daily dose of cannabis which helps him to relax and switch off.

Daniel explains: "I wait until the children have gone to bed and then I have a joint. It helps to calm me down, and I feel less tired.

"It helps with muscle spasms and with pain. I believe that if you're feeling better you perform better in life. MS is not very nice. But I'm alive and healthy. I can drive, I can take my son to Scouts, I walk with a stick but at least I can walk around."

He believes that it's better to take cannabis - mixed with herbal tobacco - than alcohol or smoke cigarettes. He welcomes the fact that the reclassification of marijuana from a class B to a class C drug, will mean that possession of small amounts would no longer be an offence.

"It is excellent. Cannabis was made illegal in 1971 and it's time the law was changed."

The change in status has also been welcomed by 'occasional' cannabis user Sylvie Brown, aged 28, from Uppertorp.

She runs a group in Sheffield for younger people, like herself who have MS, and feels it is good news that people will no longer run the risk of being criminalised, when they are trying to gain relief from symptoms.

"I know someone who swears by it and says it has really helped. In my cases I sometimes get muscle spasms, when your legs are jumping around and it's keeping you awake at night. It helps you to relax and to get to sleep."

Risks

Sylvie also welcomes the change in the law and said: "I think it's brilliant and you are not going to stop people using it if it helps them."

"I think it's better than drinking alcohol as it's a lot healthier."

But medical research suggests there are health risks.

Smoking cannabis is at least as harmful as smoking tobacco and may carry a higher risk of some respiratory cancers, according to The British Lung Foundation (BLF). It is conducting a review of the published medical literature.

In favour: MS sufferers Daniel (left) and Sylvie Brown.
 Daniel said: "It is excellent. Cannabis was made illegal in 1971 and it's time the law was changed. MS is not very nice. But I'm alive and healthy. I can drive, I can take my son to scouts, I walk with a stick but at least I can walk around." Sylvie said: "You are not going to stop people using it if it helps them. I think it's better than drinking alcohol as it's a lot healthier."



ical and scientific evidence on the impact of smoking cannabis on lung health. Its report - A Smoking Gun? The Impact of Smoking Cannabis on Respiratory Health - is due to be published later this year. But today the BLF said the report is likely to indicate an increased risk of respiratory cancers and infections associated with cannabis smoking. BLF chief executive Dame Helena Shovelton said: "Many young people are simply not aware that smoking cannabis may put them at increased risk of respiratory cancers and infections."

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