

FAQs about Psilocybin-assisted Therapy and Right To Try

What is psilocybin?

Psilocybin occurs naturally in certain mushrooms that have been used sacramentally for thousands of years. In humans, psilocybin can produce profound changes in thought, perception and emotion, including the facilitation of mystical or transformative experiences. Therapists have used psilocybin and other similar compounds to produce insight or positive changes in views about the self or the world.

Why do you think psilocybin might help patients distressed by a terminal illness or serious chronic condition?

People experiencing anxiety as a result of facing the threat of continued deterioration in health and impending death may be able to use psilocybin in concert with psychotherapy to promote emotional catharsis and powerful mystical or transformative experiences that enable them to confront or make peace with their fears in a manner that reduces anxiety. In addition to the limitations in daily functioning brought by advanced disease, many patients report that their existential uncertainty and accompanying emotional distress have a detrimental effect on overall quality of life. Therefore, psychotherapies that aim to reduce anxiety can be seen to have the dual purpose of also improving quality of life at life's end.

What conditions does psilocybin show therapeutic benefit for?

Multiple clinical studies have shown profound positive effects on anxiety and distress for patients facing a terminal cancer diagnosis. Psilocybin may also be useful in decreasing anxiety and distress associated with serious chronic conditions, such as HIV/AIDS and degenerative diseases. Studies have examined compounds similar to psilocybin for easing dependence and withdrawal symptoms associated with opiate and other drug addictions. The key ingredient for producing change appears to be the mystical-type experience that psilocybin and similar compounds can induce for some people and under the right conditions.

Is there a difference between therapeutic use and recreational use/abuse of psilocybin?

The potential therapeutic effects of psilocybin are thought to be a product of both the substance and the very specific conditions under which it is taken. In other words, the potential therapeutic effects of psilocybin do not appear to be a direct chemical consequence of psilocybin ingestion, but depend critically on expectations and the environment surrounding its use. Therapeutic use of psilocybin involves a comfortable relaxing environment, clear purpose or intentions for use, supportive therapists or facilitators, and ample time for processing and integration.

What is the Right To Try?

The Right To Try Act was first passed in Colorado in 2014 and, since then, has been adopted by most states and has been enacted into federal law. This Act gives patients facing a terminal illness the right to try investigational substances that have passed safety testing in humans, but are still being studied as part of the FDA approval process. Psilocybin is an investigational substance currently undergoing Phase II trials for FDA approval, and thus patients may potentially be able to legally use the substance under the Right To Try.

This is an area of advocacy the Nowak Society, a 501c3 non-profit in Colorado, is currently exploring. If you are interested in helping out with this effort, please contact us! www.nowaksociety.org

If you meet eligibility requirements under the Right To Try and would like a supportive therapist to guide your psilocybin session, please see the community of practitioners at An Enduring Love (www.enduringlovecolorado.com).

Sources

Byock, I. (2018). Taking psychedelics seriously. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 21(4), 417-421. Retrieved from, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5867510/pdf/jpm.2017.0684.pdf>

Griffiths, R., Johnson, M., Carducci, M., et al. (2016). Psilocybin produces substantial and sustained decreases in depression and anxiety in patients with life-threatening cancer: A randomized double-blind trial. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 30(12), 1181-1197. Retrieved from, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5367557/pdf/10.1177_0269881116675513.pdf

Ross, S. Bossis, A., Guus, J., et al. (2016). Rapid and sustained symptom reduction following psilocybin treatment for anxiety and depression in patients with life-threatening cancer: a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 30(12), 1165-1180. Retrieved from, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5367551/pdf/10.1177_0269881116675512.pdf

Swift, T., Belser, A., Agin-Liebes, G., et al. (2017). Cancer at the Dinner Table: Experiences of Psilocybin-Assisted Psychotherapy for the Treatment of Cancer-Related Distress. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 57(5), 488-519. Retrieved from, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022167817715966>

General information about Right To Try: <http://righttotry.org/>

A searchable database of research studies on psychedelics: <https://maps.org/resources/psychedelic-bibliography>