



# INFORMATION ON THE USE OF CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES

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**Read in full before use**



Government  
of Canada

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du Canada

Canada

**Health Canada is the federal department responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health.** Health Canada is committed to improving the lives of all of Canada's people and to making this country's population among the healthiest in the world as measured by longevity, lifestyle and effective use of the public health care system.

Également disponible en français sous le titre :

## **INFORMATIONS SUR L'UTILISATION DU CANNABIS À DES FINS MÉDICALES**

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## LEGEND



When it is recommended that you do something, the text is boxed like this.



Information that is important for you to know is boxed like this.



Additional information that could be useful to you is boxed like this.

# GENERAL INFORMATION

## Caution

This information applies to legal cannabis products produced and sold in Canada. These products have **not**:

- been reviewed by Health Canada to determine if they're safe or effective to treat specific diseases or symptoms
- been authorized to treat specific diseases or symptoms

Cannabis use involves health risks. We don't yet know or fully understand all of these risks.

This information is for adults who use cannabis for medical purposes. It should be used along with medical advice from your health care provider. Always consult your health care provider before starting to use cannabis for medical purposes. Use extra caution when cannabis is being used by children for medical purposes. Please consult your child's health care provider for guidance.

## About cannabis for medical purposes

Before using cannabis for medical purposes, discuss this with your health care provider, especially if you:



- have any health issues
- aren't sure how cannabis may affect you
- have a history of problems with substance use, including problematic alcohol use
- use prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, natural health products or other substances

Regular follow-up appointments with your health care provider are important to determine if you:

- need to change how much you use
- are experiencing benefits or harms from cannabis
- need to change the kind of cannabis products you use

## Possible medical uses

Health Canada hasn't authorized the use of cannabis products to treat any specific diseases or symptoms. However, the available research, although limited, suggests that cannabis might relieve:

- symptoms associated with end-of-life-care
- chronic non-cancer pain (mainly neuropathic)
- loss of appetite and weight loss associated with:
  - cancer
  - HIV/AIDS
- pain and muscle spasms from multiple sclerosis (MS)
- seizures from treatment-resistant childhood epilepsies
- insomnia and depressed mood associated with chronic diseases
- severe cancer pain that doesn't respond to conventional treatments
- severe nausea and vomiting from cancer chemotherapy that doesn't respond to conventional treatments



Your health care provider might also suggest cannabis for other diseases or symptoms.

## Active substances in cannabis

The cannabis plant contains more than 100 cannabinoids. Cannabinoids are substances unique to cannabis. They're responsible for its many effects.

The 2 most well-known and abundant cannabinoids in the cannabis plant are:

- CBD (cannabidiol)
- THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol)

CBD doesn't cause a "high" and isn't addictive.

THC can:

- impair you
- cause a "high"
- lead to addiction

The cannabis plant also contains other cannabinoids, usually in much smaller amounts. However, products made from cannabis, such as edibles and extracts, may contain much larger amounts of these cannabinoids, including:

- CBN (cannabinol)
- CBG (cannabigerol)
- CBC (cannabichromene)
- THCV (tetrahydrocannabivarin)

Some of these cannabinoids may cause a "high" or other effects on the mind, including possibly unwanted effects.

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More research will help us better understand these other cannabinoids and determine if they can:

- cause side effects
- relieve symptoms
- change the effects of THC and CBD

Learn more:

- [SIDE EFFECTS](#)

## Effects of cannabis

THC and CBD act on specific organs in the body that regulate various functions such as:

- digestion
- reproduction
- inflammation
- perception of pain
- wake and sleep cycle
- immune system activity
- stress and emotional state
- heart rate and blood pressure
- thinking and nervous system activity

## Situations when you should not take cannabis

Do **not** take cannabis if you're:

- pregnant
- breastfeeding
- planning a pregnancy
- a male experiencing fertility challenges
- allergic to cannabis or any substances found in cannabis products
- under the age of 25 unless your health care provider says the benefits outweigh the harm it could cause to your developing brain
- living with:
  - liver disease
  - kidney disease
  - heart or blood vessel disease
  - a personal or family history of:
    - psychosis
    - schizophrenia
    - other mental illnesses

Don't smoke cannabis if you're sensitive to smoke.

Don't smoke or vape cannabis if you have asthma or lung disease.

## Substances that may interact with cannabis



Tell your health care provider which substances you're currently taking, including:

- natural health products
- prescription medications
- non-prescription medications

Cannabis may interact with:

- alcohol
- antipsychotics
- blood thinners
- amphetamines
- Saint John's Wort
- oral contraceptives
- immunosuppressants
- stomach acid inhibitors
- anti-seizure medications
- certain heart medications
- antiretroviral medications
- mood stabilizing medications
- grapefruit and grapefruit juice
- oral antibiotic and antifungal medications
- antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications
- illegal drugs such as cocaine and hallucinogens
- any health products which cause dizziness or drowsiness, such as:
  - tranquilizers
  - sleeping pills
  - some pain medications
  - some muscle relaxants
  - some allergy or cold medications
  - medications for bladder problems



# CHOOSING A CANNABIS PRODUCT

## Content of a cannabis product

Cannabis products can contain:

- mostly THC
- mostly CBD
- some combination of both THC and CBD

Cannabis products can also contain other cannabinoids and terpenes. Terpenes are the substances that give cannabis its taste and smell. The types and amounts of cannabinoids and terpenes vary depending on the product.



Always read the ingredients on the label to make sure you're not allergic or sensitive to any of them.

## Cannabis product for your health condition

Currently, there isn't enough scientific information for Health Canada to recommend which cannabis product to take for any specific health condition. You and your health care provider will have to use trial and error to determine which cannabis product works best for you.

There's important information on product labels that may help you understand which product to choose for your specific symptoms, such as:

- percentages, concentrations or amounts (mg/g or mg/ml or mg) of CBD, THC or other cannabinoids in the product
- how the product is formulated (for example, dried cannabis, capsule or oil)
  - this affects how you absorb cannabinoids into your body



In general, consuming higher amounts of THC, CBD or other cannabinoids is associated with a higher risk of certain side effects.



Depending on your health condition, your health care provider may recommend 1 or more types of cannabis products. Some patients take more than 1 product to relieve their symptoms.

# USING A CANNABIS PRODUCT

## Ways to take cannabis

The most common ways to take cannabis are:

- smoking
- eating or drinking
- dissolving under the tongue
- vaping (inhaling aerosols and vapour)
- applying topically (to skin, hair or nails)

For a summary on how to reduce and manage the risks of using cannabis for medical purposes, refer to:

- [Consumer information: Cannabis](#)

## Choosing how to take your cannabis product

How you choose to use cannabis depends on:

- your personal preferences
- how long you want the effects to last
- how quickly you want to feel the effects
- what your health care provider recommends



You may still feel some of the effects of cannabis, including impairment, up to 24 hours after smoking, vaping, eating, drinking, or using cannabis under your tongue.

**Table: Factors to consider when choosing how to take your cannabis product**

Ways to take cannabis	Common products	When effects could begin	When strongest effects could occur	How long effects could last	Possible therapeutic use
Smoking	Smoking is <b>not</b> recommended as a way to use cannabis for medical purposes because cannabis smoke contains the same harmful and cancer-causing chemicals found in tobacco smoke.				

**Table: Factors to consider when choosing how to take your cannabis product**

Ways to take cannabis	Common products	When effects could begin	When strongest effects could occur	How long effects could last	Possible therapeutic use
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dried cannabis</li> <li>cannabis extracts, such as hash or infused pre-rolls</li> </ul>	Seconds or minutes	10 to 30 minutes	2 to 4 hours	Smoking may be used for symptoms or diseases that require rapid onset of effects.
Vaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vaping lets you avoid inhaling smoke, but it has other risks.</li> <li>It can expose you to substances that may cause potential long-term lung damage.</li> </ul>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dried cannabis</li> <li>cannabis extracts such as vaping liquids, wax, shatter or dabs (high THC or CBD products)</li> </ul>	Seconds or minutes	10 to 30 minutes	2 to 4 hours	Vaping may be used for symptoms or diseases that require rapid onset of effects.
Dissolving under the tongue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Products applied under the tongue, such as oral sprays, may sting or burn.</li> <li>They may also have other unpleasant effects, which you should discuss with your health care provider.</li> </ul>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lozenges</li> <li>sprays</li> <li>buccal strips</li> <li>oils</li> <li>tinctures (extracts made using alcohol, oils or glycerin)</li> </ul>	15 to 40 minutes	1.5 to 4 hours	12 hours	Dissolving under the tongue may be used for symptoms or diseases that require: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>faster onset of effects than eating or drinking</li> <li>longer duration of action than vaping or smoking</li> </ul>
Eating or drinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It takes longer to feel the effects of eating or drinking cannabis compared to other methods.</li> <li>The short-term effects can also be more unpredictable.</li> <li>The short-term risks of eating or drinking cannabis include accidentally taking too much, and poisoning.</li> <li>The timing and duration of effects depend on various factors, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the format of the product</li> <li>any other medications taken orally</li> <li>the amount or type of food in your stomach</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				

**Table: Factors to consider when choosing how to take your cannabis product**

Ways to take cannabis	Common products	When effects could begin	When strongest effects could occur	How long effects could last	Possible therapeutic use
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oils (in droppers or capsules)</li> <li>edibles (such as gummies, chocolates, or drinks)</li> <li>tinctures (extracts made using alcohol, oils or glycerin)</li> </ul>	30 minutes to 2 hours	2 to 4 hours	4 to 8 hours	Eating or drinking may be used for symptoms or diseases that require longer duration of action.
Topical application (applying to skin, hair, or nails)	Topical use may cause localized allergic reactions such as rashes and itching. We don't yet have enough information about the specific risks of topical use.				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ointments</li> <li>creams</li> <li>lotions</li> <li>oils</li> <li>balms</li> <li>salves</li> <li>patches</li> <li>gels or similar products</li> </ul>	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Topical application may be used for local relief of symptoms, but this is not well understood.
Nasal application (applying through the nose)	We don't have yet enough information about the risks of using cannabis nasally.				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sprays</li> <li>drops</li> <li>foams</li> </ul>	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Vaginal application (applying in the vagina)	We don't have yet enough information about the risks of using cannabis vaginally.				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gels</li> <li>sprays</li> <li>suppositories</li> <li>capsules</li> <li>tablets</li> <li>foams</li> </ul>	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Rectal application (applying in the rectum)	We don't have yet enough information about the risks of using cannabis rectally.				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>suppositories</li> <li>capsules</li> <li>tablets</li> <li>gels</li> </ul>	Unknown	6 to 8 hours, depending on the product	Unknown	Unknown

## Finding the right dose

The dose is the amount of cannabis that you take. The dosage is the dose of cannabis and how often you take it.

So far, we don't have precise and standardized dosages for legal cannabis products. Each person must find their own dosage. You and your health care provider can work together to find the dosage that gives you the most benefits with the least side effects. The process of finding the right dosage is called dose titration.

Talk to your health care provider about how to use your cannabis products properly, including dosage. This is especially important if you:

- are older
- use other medications
- have health conditions
- may be more vulnerable to side effects (for example, younger people)



Most people using cannabis for medical purposes use between 1 and 3 grams daily of dried cannabis or its equivalent. Some people need more but they're an exception. It's highly unusual to consume more than 10 grams or its equivalent per day.



Always start with the lowest dose and go slow. Gradually adjust the dose to achieve the best results and reduce side effects. Some patients begin cannabis therapy with CBD products before trying any with THC. Work with your health care provider to choose the products and dosage that work best for you.

## Vaping or smoking (dried cannabis or cannabis extracts)

Start with only 1 or 2 inhalations per day. Total daily amounts can vary but tend to range from 1 to 3 grams of dried cannabis or its equivalent. Beneficial effects have been reported with even less than 1 gram per day.

## Eating, drinking or dissolving under the tongue

### THC

Start with a low dose of 2.5 milligrams (mg) THC once per day. Consider a lower starting dose of 1.25 mg THC if you:

- are over the age of 55

- have specific health conditions
- are taking medications that may interact with THC and CBD

We don't know what the maximum recommended dose of THC is for any health condition.



The higher the dose of THC you take, the more likely you are to have side effects.

## CBD

Start with a low dose of 25 mg CBD per day. This can be divided into:

- 2 doses of 12.5 mg CBD
- 3 doses of about 8.3 mg CBD

We don't know what the maximum recommended dose of CBD is for any health condition.



The higher the dose of CBD you take, the more likely you are to have side effects.



CBD products can contain some THC. Read the label to make sure you know how much THC you're consuming with each dose of CBD.

## Topical, nasal, vaginal or rectal administration

There is currently no information on what dosage you should use for topical, nasal, vaginal or rectal administration of cannabis. Talk to your health care provider to choose a starting dosage.

## Recommended instructions

### Vaping or smoking

Start with only 1 or 2 vaping or smoking sessions per day. A vaping or smoking session can be defined as a period when you vape or smoke 1 or more times in a row.



Only vape or smoke in as much as you need to relieve your symptoms.

Only use cannabis more than once or twice per day if:

- you don't feel any side effects
- you need a higher dose to relieve your symptoms



Stop when you feel side effects.

## Eating, drinking or dissolving under the tongue

- If the product is in the form of an oil, start with 1 drop.
- If the product is sprayed into the mouth, start with 1 spray.
- If the product comes with a measured syringe, start with the lowest unit of the graduated marking on the syringe.



Only increase your dose if needed to relieve your symptoms.

Increase your dose by 1 oil drop, 1 spray, or the smallest unit of measurement on a syringe at a time.

## Decreasing your risks

When beginning to take cannabis or when switching to a different cannabis product:

- take it in a safe environment
- start low (lowest dose) and go slow (don't take too much at once)
- take it in the evening so it doesn't interfere with your daytime activities
- take it in the presence of someone you trust in case you experience a side effect and need medical attention
- take it around the same time every day and under the same conditions (for example with or without food) for more consistent effects



Cannabis can cause drowsiness and can impair your ability to concentrate and make quick decisions. Don't drive or operate machinery after taking cannabis.

## Monitoring your treatment



Monitor the effects of cannabis on your symptoms and share this information with your health care provider. It can help determine if the product, dosage and the way you use it is right for you.

To monitor the effects, record:

- the amount or dose, type and brand name of the product you take
- how you take it (for example vaping or eating)
- the symptoms you're treating and their intensity before and after taking cannabis
- any side effects you experience and when they occur
- what times of day you take it
- which foods or drinks you take it with
- meals eaten during the day
- any changes in:
  - appetite
  - daily activities
  - quantity and quality of sleep
  - overall energy level and how you feel and function
  - how others perceive the impact of cannabis on your function, energy level, and well-being
- any prescription medications, over-the-counter medications or natural health products taken at the same time and their doses or amounts
- anything else you think might affect the relief of your symptoms, such as:
  - drinking alcohol
  - smoking tobacco or vaping nicotine



There are some mobile apps and web tools that can help you track this information.

## Storing your cannabis products



Store cannabis securely. Keep it out of reach and out of sight of children, teenagers, and pets. Cannabis can be poisonous to children and pets. Always store cannabis products in their original child-resistant plain packaging.

Learn more:

- [Safe storage of cannabis](#)



# SIDE EFFECTS

## About side effects

Side effects are unpleasant or unwanted effects that may occur when you take a drug, medication or vaccine.

Information on side effects from the medical use of cannabis is limited.

Side effects may be due to:

- using too much cannabis
- another ingredient in the cannabis product
- a pre-existing health condition or a health condition that's getting worse
- your own sensitivity to the effects of cannabinoids such as THC and CBD
- an interaction between the cannabis and other medications or substances you use



If you use cannabis for medical purposes and you experience side effects, consult with your health care provider.

Learn more:

- [Report cannabis side effects](#)



Stop using cannabis and seek immediate medical attention if any of your side effects are a significant concern to you.



If you have accidentally taken cannabis or have taken too much, call for advice:

- 1-844-POISON-X (1-844-764-7669) or
- 1-800-463-5060 in Quebec

## Side effects of cannabis

The following lists are possible side effects that could occur when you use cannabis. These are not complete lists of all possible side effects. Discuss any side effects with your health care provider.

Some side effects from smoking or vaping cannabis are similar to smoking tobacco or vaping nicotine, such as:

- cough
- shortness of breath
- chest pain or discomfort
- throat and lung irritation

Examples of **THC** side effects include:

- seizures
- dry mouth
- hallucinations
- blurred vision
- fast heartbeat
- nausea, vomiting
- feeling “too high”
- reduced inhibition
- increased appetite
- feeling tired or sleepy
- red, irritated, or dry eyes
- dependence or addiction
- feeling disoriented or confused
- psychosis, which occurs when you:
  - hallucinate
  - don’t know what’s real
  - have false beliefs or disorganized thoughts
- severe anxiety or severe low mood
- thinking of harming yourself or others
- local skin reactions (redness, rash, itch)
- feeling suspicious, anxious, panicked or paranoid
- thinking differently than usual or thinking abnormally
- severe allergic reaction that could include a combination of:
  - hives
  - fainting
  - dizziness
  - rapid heartbeat
  - difficulty breathing
  - swelling of the eyes, throat or tongue
- difficulty focusing, remembering, thinking or making decisions
- cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome, which involves repeated episodes of:
  - severe nausea
  - intense and prolonged vomiting
  - stomach pain that’s resistant to treatment
- loss of balance or coordination, dizziness, headache or feeling lightheaded or faint

Examples of **CBD** side effects include:

- fever
- cough
- weakness
- decreased appetite
- feeling tired or sleepy
- local skin reactions (redness, rash or itch)
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation
- liver problems, which can cause symptoms such as:
  - fatigue
  - nausea
  - vomiting
  - loss of appetite
  - abdominal pain
  - unusual darkening of the urine
  - yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes (jaundice)
- a severe allergic reaction that could include a combination of:
  - hives
  - fainting
  - dizziness
  - rapid heartbeat
  - difficulty breathing
  - swelling of the eyes, throat or tongue

Side effects associated with other cannabinoids such as CBN, CBG, CBC, and THCV aren't well known.

## **Side effects during pregnancy and breastfeeding**

Using cannabis during pregnancy can:

- harm your fetus (unborn baby)
- affect brain and behavioural development of children

Cannabinoids in cannabis are transferred from the mother to the child and can harm your baby.

Learn more:

- [Thinking about using cannabis before or during pregnancy](#)

## Medical emergencies



If you experience a medical emergency related to cannabis, call 9-1-1 and tell the operator you used cannabis.

Here are some examples of medical emergencies:

- seizures
- chest pain
- trouble breathing
- loss of consciousness
- trouble understanding, reading or speaking
- abnormal or unusual thoughts such as thoughts of suicide
- serious allergic reactions resulting in rash, hives, itch or swelling (especially of face, tongue, and throat), severe dizziness, trouble breathing

## Possible health concerns from long-term use

Smoking cannabis can:

- expose you to the same harmful and cancer-causing chemicals found in tobacco smoke
- increase your risk of a chronic cough or other lung problems, especially if you smoke regularly

Vaping dried cannabis and cannabis extracts can expose you to substances that may cause potential long-term lung damage.

More research is needed to better understand the impact of vaping cannabis products on lung health.

Some possible health effects that may occur from long-term use of cannabis include:

- liver problems
- problematic cannabis use
- decrease in the effects of cannabis (tolerance)
- changes in hormones that can affect the menstrual cycle and fertility
- withdrawal-type symptoms if you abruptly stop using cannabis, such as:
  - chills
  - anxiety
  - craving
  - irritability
  - headache
  - restlessness
  - stomach pain
  - depressed mood

- anger or aggression
- shakiness and sweating
- insomnia or sleep difficulties
- nightmares or strange dreams
- decreased appetite or weight loss
- cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome, which involves repeated episodes of:
  - severe nausea
  - intense and prolonged vomiting
  - stomach pain that's resistant to treatment
- increased risk of triggering or worsening psychiatric or mood disorders including:
  - anxiety
  - psychosis
  - depression
  - schizophrenia
  - bipolar disorder
- decreased sperm count and other changes in the sperm that can affect male fertility

There may be other health effects of frequent cannabis use that we don't yet know about.

### **If cannabis use becomes a problem**

You may have problems with cannabis use if you:

- use it even if it harms your health
- keep using it even though you want to stop
- increase the amount you use but don't notice any increase in benefits
- miss commitments at home, work or school because of your cannabis use



If you or someone you know needs support for problems with cannabis use, contact your health care provider or your local addiction treatment centre.

Learn more:

- [Addiction to cannabis](#)
- [Get help with substance use](#)

### **Report side effects**



You can report side effects to your health care practitioner, the product manufacturer, or directly to Health Canada:



For more information, refer to:

- [Report side effects from cannabis products](#)

## REFERENCES

Health Canada used the following references to develop this content:

- [Information for health care professionals: Cannabis \(marihuana, marijuana\) and the cannabinoids \(Health Canada\)](#)
- [Cannabis sativa: The unconventional "weed" allergen \(Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol\)](#)
- [Pharmacokinetics and tolerability of Delta9-THC-hemisuccinate in a suppository formulation as an alternative to capsules for the systemic delivery of Delta9-THC. \(Med Cannabis Cannabinoids\)](#)
- [Practical considerations in medical cannabis administration and dosing. \(Eur J Intern Med\)](#)
- [The medicinal use of cannabis and cannabinoids--an international cross-sectional survey on administration forms \(J Psychoactive Drugs\)](#)
- [Details for: EPIDIOLEX \(Health Canada\)](#)
- [The marijuana, cannabinoids, and female reproductive system \(J Appl Toxicol\)](#)
- [Cannabis use during pregnancy: An update \(Medicina \(Kaunas\)\)](#)
- [Cannabis and Breastfeeding. \(Breastfeeding Medicine\)](#)