

UNDERSTANDING MEDICAL CANNABIS



Cannabis is a flowering plant that produces chemicals called **cannabinoids**, which can be used to treat the symptoms of a number of conditions, including arthritis.

MEDICAL CANNABIS

- Used to address symptoms of various health conditions
- Dosing can be indicated so that there is little to no euphoric effect ("high")
- Requires medical document (authorization)
- Accessed directly from a Health Canada Licensed Producer or grown by consumer

RECREATIONAL CANNABIS

- Used for non-medicinal purposes
- Generally used for euphoric effect ("high")
- Not a safe substitute for supervised care
- Accessed from an authorized recreational cannabis retailer or grown by consumer

1. MEDICAL CANNABIS AND ARTHRITIS



Cannabinoids interact with our body's **endocannabinoid** system, which can affect inflammation, immune function, appetite, heart function, memory, and mood.

While medical cannabis can't cure arthritis or slow disease progression, there are studies that demonstrate it can help relieve arthritis pain as well as address sleep issues and anxiety.

2. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THC & CBD

CBD and THC are the key active ingredients in medical cannabis.



CBD, or cannabidiol, is a non-euphoric chemical, which means it will not make you feel "high" and can even help counteract some of the negative effects of THC when they are used together. CBD has been used to treat inflammation and chronic pain, as well as to manage anxiety and insomnia.



THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, is the chemical that can cause a “high” or intoxicated feeling when taken in sufficient doses, but in small doses it can be helpful for some symptoms. THC can help decrease pain, anxiety, tension and nausea. When taken in higher doses, it can heighten sensory perceptions, alter sense of time, and impact motor control. High doses of THC may also bring feelings of anxiety and paranoia for some people.



Medical cannabis products can contain primarily CBD, primarily THC, or a balance of the two. It’s recommended that individuals with arthritis start with CBD-dominant products and introduce THC in small amounts if needed.

3. DELIVERY METHODS

Medical cannabis can be ingested, inhaled, applied topically as a cream, or dissolved as a spray. Depending on the form of medical cannabis, the rate at which you experience its effects can vary.



CANNABIS OIL

Cannabis oil is diluted with a carrier oil, such as sunflower or avocado, and is used with a dropper or put into a capsule. The oil can be mixed with food or drink or placed directly under the tongue, where it is held for one minute to facilitate transfer into the blood stream.



SPRAYS

Sprays are applied under the tongue and absorbed into the bloodstream.



TOPICAL CREAMS

Topical creams can be applied directly on the skin and are absorbed into the blood stream. Topical creams can have pain-relieving effects at the site of application.



CANNABIS-INFUSED FOODS

Also known as edibles. These include any food products created using cannabis, such as items made with cooking fats infused with cannabis (i.e. olive oil, coconut oil, butter). These are processed by your body’s digestive system and take up to 2 hours to reach maximum effect. The effects of edible cannabis also last longer.



INHALED-VAPORIZERS, E-CIGARETTES, JOINTS

Dried cannabis needs to be heated in order for CBD and THC to take effect. Vaporizers and e-cigarettes use heating elements that can activate the chemicals.

Smoking medical cannabis is not recommended.

4. DOSAGE



If you are using medical cannabis for the first time, it's recommended to start with a CBD-dominant product at the lowest dose, and gradually increase your dosage until your symptom needs are met. Capsules and oil make it easier to accurately track dosage and find the lowest dose for symptom management.



For cannabis-infused foods, it's important to exercise caution and take small amounts with lower doses of THC, as the effects of edibles can be stronger than other forms of cannabis and may result in more pronounced side effects.

5. RISKS AND CONTRAINDICATIONS



When taken in sufficient doses, THC has side effects that impact sensory processing, cognition and fine motor coordination. It can also cause anxiety and panic attacks in some people.



People who are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or are breastfeeding should not use cannabis.



The federal government has established legal limits for blood THC content. Individuals should not drive after using cannabis. The amount of time that is needed before driving depends on the method of administration and the THC content of the cannabis used.



Cannabis use can be harmful for individuals with a personal or family history of psychotic illness, substance use disorder or suicidal thoughts.



People under 25, individuals who have had a substance use disorder, and those who use THC frequently are at a higher risk of developing a cannabis use disorder (cannabis addiction).

This information was reviewed in October 2019 with expert advice from:
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