

# A Guide to Cannabis for **Older Adults**

## What Is Cannabis?

Cannabis, commonly called marijuana, pot or weed, is a product made from the cannabis plant. It is often used for non-medical purposes because of its intoxicating effects or the “high” it produces. Cannabis can also be used for medical purposes. However, for most health conditions, more research is still needed to determine whether it is effective. Cannabis contains over 100 chemical compounds called cannabinoids. The two best-known cannabinoids are:

- **Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)** is the primary “psychoactive” component of cannabis. It is the ingredient in cannabis that produces the high. Research suggests that THC might have some medical benefits for certain health conditions.
- **Cannabidiol (CBD)** does not produce a high, but can cause drowsiness. Scientists are also studying CBD for its medical applications.

Cannabis comes in many forms, including dried cannabis, cannabis extracts and cannabis topicals. Edible cannabis products, commonly known as edibles, are cannabis-infused food (e.g., chocolate) and drinks (e.g., tea).

### Did You Know?

Concentrations of THC in dried cannabis have increased over the past few decades. In 1995, dried cannabis contained about **4% THC**. Nowadays, it averages about **15–20% THC**.

Some cannabis extracts, called concentrates, can contain **more than 80% THC**.

There are also cannabis products that are made up mostly of CBD and contain only small amounts of THC.

**Always read the label to check the amount and concentrations of THC and CBD.**

## What Can I Expect When Using Cannabis?

**Cannabis affects everyone differently.**

Smoking, vaping or eating cannabis products can lead to feelings of euphoria (happiness) and relaxation. It can also cause impairment, which can include:

- Concentration and memory problems
- Impaired motor skills and slower reaction time that can increase the risk of falls and injury

**Cannabis can impair  
your ability to drive safely.  
Cannabis-impaired driving is illegal.**

Consuming too much cannabis or cannabis with higher levels of THC can lead to over-intoxication. Symptoms can include:

- Anxiety, panic and elevated heart rate
- Nausea and vomiting
- Paranoia and psychosis (i.e., hallucinations and delusions)

**If you or someone you know has  
consumed too much cannabis  
and is not feeling well,  
seek medical attention.**

## How Is Cannabis Used?

Cannabis can be inhaled, ingested or applied topically. Legally sold cannabis products will be marked with a label, which will have the amount of THC and CBD they contain and health warnings listed.



**WARNING:** The effects from eating or drinking cannabis can be long-lasting. The effects can last between 6 and 12 hours following use.

**MISE EN GARDE :** Les effets de la consommation de produits comestibles à base de cannabis peuvent être de longue durée. Les effets peuvent durer de six à douze heures après la consommation.

### Can I Use Cannabis with Other Substances?

Using **cannabis with other substances, including but not limited to alcohol, opioids and cocaine**, can be dangerous to your health.

Smoking **cannabis with tobacco** can increase your exposure to harmful chemicals that can increase your risk of lung and heart disease.

**If you choose to use cannabis, be aware of the risks of mixing cannabis with other substances.**

# 1

## Inhalation

Dried cannabis and some cannabis extracts can be smoked in a joint, a pipe or a bong, or vaporized (“vaped”) using an electronic vaporizer.

Effects can be felt within **seconds to a few minutes** and last up to **six hours** after use, with some effects lasting up to **24 hours**.

**Start with no more than 100 milligrams per gram (10%) of THC and an equal or higher amount of CBD, and take no more than one or two puffs.**

# 2

## Ingestion

Edible cannabis products, such as cannabis-infused food and drinks, and cannabis oils are consumed through eating and drinking. Cannabis oral sprays and tinctures are extracts that are placed under the tongue or in the cheek.

Effects can take up to **four hours** to appear and can last up to **12 hours** after use, with some effects lasting up to **24 hours**.

**Start with an edible that has no more than 2.5 milligrams of THC and an equal or higher amount of CBD.**

# 3

## Topical Application

Cannabis topicals such as oils and creams are applied to the skin, hair or nails. These products may be marketed for medical (managing pain, arthritis, etc.) and cosmetic purposes (skin, nail and hair care). Presently, there is no scientific evidence to support their effectiveness.

**Avoid applying cannabis topicals to damaged or broken skin or getting any in the mouth or eyes.**



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## What Are the Health Risks of Using Cannabis?

### Daily or near-daily cannabis use can:

- Increase the risk of psychosis and schizophrenia;
- Worsen anxiety and depression; and
- Affect your memory, concentration and ability to make decisions.

Cannabis, when smoked regularly, can lead to sore throat, hoarse voice, coughing, wheezing, tightness in chest and chronic bronchitis.

### Can I Use Cannabis If I'm Taking Medication?

**Cannabis can interact with your medications and affect your health. Medications that can interact with cannabis include:**

- Pain medications
- Heart medications and blood thinners
- Sleeping pills
- Anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications
- Antibiotic and antifungal medications
- Allergy, cold and flu medications
- Heartburn medications
- Anti-seizure medications
- Drugs to treat HIV/AIDS
- ADHD medications

**Talk to your healthcare provider if you're considering using cannabis for medical or non-medical purposes.**



## What are the Health Benefits of Cannabis?

Cannabis, in particular CBD, has gained attention for its potential medical applications for treating or managing health conditions such as chronic pain, difficulty sleeping, anxiety and depression. Although there is some promising evidence, not enough is currently known about the effectiveness of CBD.

Two cannabis-related drugs have been approved for managing certain medical conditions in Canada — Nabilone® and Sativex®. They are only available by prescription and might not be effective or suitable for everyone.

No other cannabis-related product, including fresh or dried cannabis, or cannabis oils, has been approved for therapeutic use and sale in Canada.

