

# What Does Research Say About Treating Medical Conditions with Cannabis and Cannabinoids?

There is **substantial evidence** supporting the **use of prescription cannabinoids** for the following conditions:

## Chemotherapy-Induced Nausea and Vomiting

Cannabinoid medication containing a synthetic version of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) can reduce nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy, but side effects are common. Nabilone is a prescription cannabinoid approved in Canada for treating this condition.

## Symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Studies show a medication containing a specific concentration and ratio of THC and cannabidiol (CBD) can provide symptomatic relief of spasticity (stiff muscles and exaggerated movements) in some adults with MS who have not responded adequately to other therapies. Nabiximols is a prescription cannabinoid approved in Canada for treating this symptom of MS.

## Symptoms of Seizure Disorders

Studies show a medication containing CBD is effective in treating two types of treatment-resistant childhood seizure disorders (Dravet syndrome and Lennox-Gastaut syndrome). A prescription cannabinoid medication containing CBD, Epidiolex is approved in Canada for treating these seizure disorders.

## AIDS-Related Anorexia Associated with Weight Loss

Evidence supports the use of dronabinol (a medication containing synthetic THC) for treating this condition. However, this medication is no longer available in Canada (since 2012).

## Chronic Neuropathic Pain

In addition to these conditions, there is **moderate evidence** to suggest that cannabinoid medications containing THC, CBD or both may be beneficial for the short-term relief of chronic neuropathic pain. At time of publishing, no prescription cannabinoids have been approved in Canada for this use. More studies are needed to support more definitive conclusions.

There is **insufficient and limited evidence** supporting the use of cannabis and cannabinoid medications for these conditions (and others not listed):

- Anxiety disorders
- Autism spectrum disorders
- Cancer cachexia
- Cancer pain
- Fibromyalgia
- Headaches and migraine
- Insomnia and sleep disorders
- Mood and depressive disorders
- Parkinson disease
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Substance use disorders

The results of studies on the use of cannabis and cannabinoid medications to treat these conditions are still **conflicting and unclear**.

## Risks and Potential Side Effects

There are risks and potential side effects of using cannabis, even for medical purposes.

- ⬡ **Mood and depressive disorders** — The available evidence suggests that frequent cannabis use — particularly daily or near daily use of cannabis products with high THC — might be associated with more harms for individuals with depression. These include worsening symptoms of depression, impeding improvement of symptoms of depression and being at increased risk of developing cannabis use disorder. There is limited research examining how cannabis use might interact with known risk factors for depression, including adverse childhood events, genetic predisposition and other social determinants of health.
- ⬡ **Pregnancy and Breastfeeding/Chestfeeding** — There is not enough evidence to support using any form of cannabis to treat negative symptoms of pregnancy, such as nausea, vomiting and pain. Cannabis use during pregnancy can impact the fetus's mental and physical development. Cannabis use during breastfeeding/chestfeeding can impact the infant's mental and physical development.
- ⬡ **Interaction with Other Medications** — Cannabis can interact with medications and natural health products and affect a person's health. Medications that can interact with cannabis include medications for pain, flu and cold, seizure, depression, anxiety, sleep, allergies, and other conditions. The types of medications that can interact with cannabis are commonly used and include both prescription and over-the-counter drugs.
- ⬡ **Impaired Driving** — Cannabis use can impair the ability to drive by reducing concentration, attention and reaction time, and by altering perception of time and distance.
- ⬡ **Mental Health** — Frequent cannabis use can increase the risk for cannabis use disorder and psychosis (especially if there is a family history of psychosis and if cannabis use starts early).
- ⬡ **Lung and Heart Health** — Cannabis smoke contains many of the same chemicals as tobacco smoke that are known to be associated with heart and lung illnesses.

### Experience side effects from cannabis?

Health Canada encourages consumers, patients and healthcare practitioners to [report side effects from cannabis products](#).

If someone is considering using cannabis for medical purposes, they should speak with a healthcare provider.

Learn more at [ccsa.ca/cannabis](https://ccsa.ca/cannabis).

