

Frequently asked questions about medical cannabis

1. WHAT IS MEDICAL CANNABIS?

The term “medical cannabis” refers to the cannabis plant, and products made from it, when used to manage the symptoms of a medical condition.

2. WHAT ARE THE MAIN ACTIVE INGREDIENTS?

The active ingredients of medical cannabis are known as cannabinoids. Although hundreds of different molecules have been identified, the two most important are tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD):

- THC is the main psychoactive agent
- CBD can enhance the positive effects of the natural cannabinoids already present in the body. It does not produce a “high” and may even help to counteract the psychoactive effects of THC

Cannabis also contains minor cannabinoids like CBG and CBN that are less studied but appear to produce various effects in the body. The ratio of THC to CBD, and the presence of other active cannabinoids, varies from one strain or variety of cannabis to another.

3. WHY DO PATIENTS TAKE MEDICAL CANNABIS?

Medical cannabis is commonly used by patients suffering from symptoms of various conditions including pain, anxiety, insomnia, appetite/weight loss, nausea and vomiting, seizures and spasticity.

4. WHAT ARE THE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF MEDICAL CANNABIS?

Side effects of cannabis will vary by patient, strain, cannabinoid content and method of administration. Most of the typical side effects associated with cannabis are caused by the THC component, but there are also possible side effects with CBD and other cannabinoids. Some of these effects are desired when cannabis is used recreationally but may not be wanted when cannabis is used medicinally, e.g., feelings of being “high”, euphoric, and changes in perception. Increased heart rate, red eyes, dilated pupils, and increased appetite are common, as are impairments to coordination and concentration that can affect activities such as driving. In rare cases, patients can have negative experiences such as anxiety, panic, and paranoid thoughts, particularly when doses are too high.

5. HOW IS A PATIENT’S DAILY DOSE DETERMINED?

The starting dose of medical cannabis must be individualized for each patient based on several factors, including the severity of symptoms, the patient’s prior level of experience with cannabis, and the method of administration. Doses should be adjusted based on the patient’s response, to achieve the desired effects at the lowest possible dose.

Generally, a “Start Low, Go Slow” method is used where patients start with a low dose and increase gradually. Slow titration is important for finding the minimal effective dose while mitigating undesired effects.

6. WHAT ARE COMMON WAYS TO USE MEDICAL CANNABIS?



INGESTION: Cannabis can be taken orally in the form of cannabis oil, capsules or edibles. This route of administration has a delayed onset of effect (up to 1-3 hours) but also a long duration of action (up to 6-10 hours), making it suitable for chronic or persistent symptoms.



TOPICAL: Cannabis can be used topically in the form of a cream, gel, etc. This route of administration provides localized benefits, while generally bypassing risks associated with whole body side effects and drug interactions.



SUBLINGUAL: Specific cannabis formulations, like sublingual sprays, can be optimized to allow cannabinoids to absorb through blood vessels under the tongue. This route allows for a faster onset of effect (within 15-45 minutes) and can be used to help with symptoms that need to be treated quickly.



INHALATION: Vaporizing cannabis, using heat to extract the active ingredients without burning, is preferred over smoking. Inhaled cannabis produces a relatively rapid effect (within 5-15 minutes) that is short-lasting (up to 2-4 hours) and can be used for symptoms that require immediate treatment. Long term effects of vaporizing on lung function are not known.

7. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEDICAL, PRESCRIPTION, RECREATIONAL AND ILLICIT CANNABIS?

Medical Cannabis (Health Canada licensed producer like MyMedi.ca)	Prescription Cannabinoid Medicines	Recreational Cannabis (brick and mortar legal stores)	Illicit Sources (illegal dispensaries, black market)
Wide variety of cannabinoid ratios, forms and strengths available Products generally catered to medical patients (non-intoxicating options, various forms suited to medical conditions)	Specific form and cannabinoid ratio which is approved as a medication by government authority No flexibility in formulation and very limited options - may not work for everyone	Wide variety of cannabinoid ratios, forms and strengths available Many high THC and smokeable options to achieve the "high" or intoxicating effect of cannabis	No way to know what is actually in product Mainly high THC and smokeable options to achieve the "high" or intoxicating effect of cannabis
Guidance and support from a healthcare professional Cannabis-Trained Pharmacists available at MyMedi.ca to provide patient support	Guidance and support from a healthcare professional	No oversight or guidance from a healthcare professional Budtenders at recreational store have no medical training and cannot comment on safety and effectiveness	No oversight or guidance from a healthcare professional
Strict quality and safety standards from Health Canada	Highest quality and safety standards from Health Canada	Strict quality and safety standards from Health Canada	No quality and safety standards (may contain unsafe or harmful additives)
May be eligible for insurance coverage and discount programs with medical cannabis LPs	May be eligible for insurance coverage	No insurance coverage or discount programs available	No insurance coverage or discount programs available
Medical cannabis can be claimed as a medical expense on taxes	Prescription medicines may be claimed as a medical expense	Not claimable as a medical expense on taxes	Not claimable as a medical expense on taxes

8. HOW DO PATIENTS ACCESS MEDICAL CANNABIS?

Patients must first obtain a medical document from a physician (or a nurse practitioner) that includes specific details like the recommended daily quantity of cannabis. Patients then obtain their medical cannabis in one of three ways:

- By registering with MyMedi.ca or another Health Canada licensed producer (LP). Products are delivered by mail directly to the patient's home, or to their healthcare professional's office if approved by both parties
- By registering with Health Canada to grow small quantities of their own cannabis
- By designating someone else to grow it for them

9. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PHARMACIES AND PHARMACISTS IN MEDICAL CANNABIS USE?

Although the regulations do not currently allow cannabis to be dispensed through pharmacies, pharmacists can play a key role in ensuring that cannabis is effectively integrated into the patient's overall medication plan.

Cannabis-trained pharmacists are available to provide counselling on topics such as drug interactions, side effects and appropriate use through MyMedi.ca's Patient Support Team.

10. IS MEDICAL CANNABIS COVERED BY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS OR INSURANCE COMPANIES?

Medical cannabis may be covered by specific government programs like Worker's Compensation Boards and Veteran's Affairs Canada. It is currently not covered by provincial drug plans or included in general disability benefits.

Medical cannabis is covered by some private insurance plans, either through a prior authorization or health-spending account. Please contact your benefits provider, to find out if your private insurance plan covers medical cannabis. If medical cannabis is covered under your plan, they should direct you on the process to obtain coverage.

Even if medical cannabis is not covered, you may be eligible for discount programs offered by MyMedi.ca (seniors, low-income, first responders & pediatric) and you will be able to claim the costs as a medical expense on your taxes.

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