

Important information and warnings about using medical cannabis

Use of medical cannabis products is experimental

Use of medical cannabis products may or may not relieve your symptoms. Existing studies of medical cannabis suggest symptom relief can vary from patient to patient. Side effects are very common. Among the most common side effects are dizziness, fatigue, dry mouth, light-headedness, drowsiness, and nausea. Side effects are usually mild to moderate in severity and usually resolve quickly, but occasionally severe side effects occur. There are unknowns each time a patient starts taking any new medication and these unknowns are particularly prominent for medical cannabis, which is not approved for use by the Food and Drug Administration. For most conditions, more study of medical cannabis is needed to understand its proper role in comprehensive medical care.

Tell all your health care professionals about the medical cannabis you are using

Medical cannabis can interfere with other drugs you are taking. Make sure to tell all your health care professionals about the medical cannabis you are taking. Blood levels of other medications might need to be checked, and doses of the medications might need to be adjusted.

Warning

The following groups are believed to be at increased risk of harm from use of cannabis. Persons in these groups should generally not use medical cannabis:

- Children, adolescents, and young adults
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Persons with a personal or family history of psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia

See below for additional information on risks of cannabis in these populations. For a brief review of the scientific literature on these topics, on the Minnesota Medical Cannabis website see [Brief Review of Studies Regarding Increased Risk of Harm with Cannabis Use \(PDF\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/topics/cannabis/practitioners/humanstudies.pdf) <http://www.health.state.mn.us/topics/cannabis/practitioners/humanstudies.pdf>

Risks for use by children, adolescents, and young adults

Use of medical cannabis in children, adolescents, and young adults should be approached with special caution. There is evidence that recreational use of marijuana during the active period of brain development through young adulthood can lead to cognitive impairment. There is also an association between recreational use of marijuana in this population and onset of psychotic mental illness such as schizophrenia. Much remains unknown about who is at risk and whether these risks with recreational marijuana use apply to use of products with high levels of THC – to children, adolescents, and young adults with serious disease and incapacitation symptoms despite all conventional medical treatments.

Risk for use by women who are pregnant or breastfeeding

Avoid medical cannabis if you are pregnant, are planning to get pregnant or are breastfeeding. There is some evidence that use of cannabis while pregnant can cause harm to the developing baby. Cannabis used by a mother while breastfeeding transfers to the infant through the breast milk, and could cause harm to the infant.

Risk of psychotic episodes and psychotic disease

Recreational use of marijuana is known to sometimes cause psychotic episodes. These can be very unpleasant and potentially dangerous. This risk is likely to be higher with medical cannabis extract products with very high ratios of THC to CBD. There is some evidence that cannabis adds to the risk of developing psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia – especially in persons who also have other risk factors. Having a family history of schizophrenia or other psychotic disorder is a risk factor. For that reason, medical cannabis should not be used or should be used with great caution in patients with a family history of psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia. Because there is evidence that cannabis use by persons with a diagnosed psychotic disorder results in worse outcomes, medical cannabis – especially products with high levels of THC – should be avoided in persons with psychotic disorders.

Risk of cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome

Persons who develop this syndrome have nausea, severe vomiting, and abdominal pain for days that repeats every week or every few weeks. Multiple patients enrolled in the program have ended up hospitalized for cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome. They have been using high THC products when they developed the syndrome.

Risks for use by persons with serious heart or liver disease

Do not use medical cannabis, or use it with great caution, if you have serious heart or liver disease. There is some evidence that use of medical cannabis could cause a heart attack in patients known to have serious heart disease. Serious liver disease could cause problems with how the body metabolizes cannabis.

Do not drive, operate machinery, or do work that could harm people when under the influence of medical cannabis

Medical cannabis can impair perception, reaction time, motor skills, and attention in ways that make it dangerous to drive, operate machinery, or engage in any activity at home or at work that could harm others or cause professional malpractice. Just how long such impairments will last for a particular individual taking a particular type and dose of medical cannabis is unknown, but it is at least several hours. Impairment is likely to be greater when taking medical cannabis products with high THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content. Drinking alcohol while taking medical cannabis makes impairment much worse.

Start low, go slow

To avoid having unpleasant side effects, it is best to start at a low dose and then increase the dose slowly over time until the symptoms are relieved or side effects develop. Pharmacists at the Cannabis Patient Centers will follow this methodology. Talk to the pharmacist at a Cannabis Patient Center about recommendations for how to increase dosage and what to do if side effects appear. You might want to purchase less than a 30-day supply of medical cannabis during your first few visits to a Cannabis Patient Center until you learn how you respond to a particular medical cannabis product.

Keep medications secure and in their original containers

When medications are not in their original containers, it is easier to mix up the identity of a drug. The label on the original container identifies the lawful owner of the product. As with any medication, medical cannabis should be kept in a secure place where others such as children cannot gain access to it.

Don't use medical cannabis where it is illegal

Under Minnesota law, it remains illegal for a patient enrolled in the medical cannabis program to possess or use medical cannabis on a school bus or van, on the grounds of a preschool or a primary or secondary school, in any correctional facility, or on the grounds of any childcare facility or home day care. Vaporizing medical cannabis is illegal on any form of public transportation, any location where with vapor would be inhaled by a non-patient minor child, or in any public place, including indoor or outdoor areas used by or open to the general public or at a place of employment.

Do not give or sell to others medical cannabis that you purchase

Sharing medical cannabis you obtain under the program with others is a crime, and you could face criminal charges and be excluded from the Minnesota Medical Cannabis program.

Risk of dependence and addiction

Use of medical cannabis could lead to cannabis dependence and addiction. The risk of addiction is likely to be higher with products that are high in THC and for persons who have already experienced addictions. Medical cannabis should be used with great caution, if at all, in patients with pre-existing addiction disorders. Among heavy, regular users of recreational marijuana, stopping use abruptly can lead to distressing withdrawal symptoms for several days. The risk of withdrawal symptoms for medical cannabis products is likely to vary with product composition and dose. It is probably more likely with large doses of products with high THC content.

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