



Understanding Cannabis: A Balanced Perspective

To support patients in making informed decisions, this guide offers a balanced perspective on cannabis use. It also provides guidance on recognizing signs of potentially problematic use.

It is important to note that state laws vary around the legality of cannabis, for both medical and recreational use.

Potential Perceived Benefits (Often Associated with Low and Infrequent Use):

For some, cannabis may offer certain perceived benefits when used in moderation and infrequently, but more evidence is needed. These may include:

- **Relaxation and Stress Reduction:** Many people report a sense of calm and reduced anxiety after cannabis consumption.
- **Pain Management:** Although data is conflicting, some people report that cannabis products help alleviate their chronic pain.
- **Nausea and Vomiting Relief:** Cannabis products can be effective in reducing nausea and vomiting, especially in patients undergoing chemotherapy.
- **Appetite Stimulation:** Cannabis can increase appetite, which can be beneficial for individuals experiencing appetite loss due to medical conditions or treatments.

Risks Associated with Regular and High-Dose Cannabis Use:

While some people use cannabis to manage anxiety, long-term or heavy use can actually worsen mental health, **increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, and even psychosis**, especially in those already vulnerable. It's important to recognize when cannabis use becomes a problem.

Many people turn to cannabis for temporary relief from anxiety, and it can feel like it's working in the moment. However, regular use can create a cycle where **cannabis actually increases your underlying anxiety over time**, especially with higher THC containing products. This means you might feel like you need to use more and more to get that same sense of calm, trapping you in a pattern where the very thing you're using to cope is making your anxiety worse. Recognizing this cycle is important, as it can be **a sign that cannabis is no longer helping, but rather contributing to your anxiety**.



Risks Associated with Cannabis Use Include:

- **Mental Health Effects:**
 - Increased risk of anxiety, depression, and psychosis, particularly in individuals with pre-existing mental health vulnerabilities.
 - Impaired cognitive function, including memory, attention, and learning difficulties.
- **Hyperemesis Syndrome:** Long-term, heavy cannabis has been linked to severe, repeated episodes of nausea and vomiting that are often relieved by heat (i.e. hot showers or baths).
- **Respiratory Problems:** Smoking cannabis can irritate the lungs and lead to chronic bronchitis, similar to the effects of tobacco smoking.
- **Cardiovascular Effects:** Increased heart rate and potential for cardiovascular complications, particularly in individuals with pre-existing heart conditions.
- **Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD):** Regular use can lead to tolerance, dependence, and addiction, characterized by withdrawal symptoms when use is discontinued.

Understanding Different Formulations of THC-Containing Products:

The method of consumption and the concentration of THC can significantly influence the effects of cannabis. It is important to be aware of the different formulations:

- **Smoked Cannabis (Flower):** The traditional form, with varying THC content.
- **Vaporized Cannabis (Vape Pens):** Can deliver high concentrations of THC rapidly, leading to potent effects.
- **Edibles:** Oral consumption can result in delayed and unpredictable effects, with a higher risk of accidental overdose due to the difficulty in controlling dosage.
- **Concentrates (Dabs, Oils):** Contain extremely high levels of THC, leading to intense psychoactive effects and increased risk of adverse reactions.
- **Topicals (Creams, Lotions):** Applied to the skin, generally do not produce psychoactive effects.

Driving Under the Influence: A Serious Warning:

- Driving under the influence of cannabis is illegal and extremely dangerous.
- Cannabis impairs judgment, coordination, and reaction time, significantly increasing the risk of motor vehicle accidents.
- Never drive or operate heavy machinery after consuming cannabis.



Recognizing a Potential Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD):

Signs of a cannabis use disorder include:

- Needing more cannabis to achieve the same effect (tolerance)
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms like irritability or insomnia when you try to stop
- Using more than intended, or continuing to use despite negative impacts on your life

If you find yourself relying on cannabis to cope with everyday stress or experiencing these signs, it's important to talk to a trusted healthcare professional. While formal diagnoses require clinical evaluation, these questions can help you assess your relationship with cannabis:

- **Tolerance:**
 - Have you noticed a significant increase in the amount of cannabis you use to achieve the desired effect?
 - Has the quantity of cannabis you purchase weekly increased substantially?
- **Withdrawal:**
 - What is the longest recent period you have gone without using cannabis?
 - Do you experience any negative symptoms, such as irritability, anxiety, insomnia, or cravings, when you abstain from cannabis for a few days?

If you answer "yes" to these questions, it may indicate developing a cannabis use disorder or problematic use, and it's essential to seek professional guidance.

Key Considerations:

- The effects of cannabis can vary significantly based on individual factors, dosage, and consumption method.
- If you have any underlying health conditions, consult with your doctor before using cannabis.
- Be aware of and adhere to the legal regulations regarding cannabis use in your area.
- Start with low doses and increase gradually, if necessary, to minimize the risk of adverse effects.