

Cannabis & Older Adults

A Candid Conversation



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CCSMH

Canadian Coalition for
Seniors' Mental Health
Connecting People, Ideas
and Resources

What is cannabis?

Cannabis, also known as marijuana, weed, or pot, is a product that is made from the cannabis plant.

It comes in many forms, including dried leaves, extracts, topicals gels or lotions, and edible products like gummy candies, cookies, or soda drinks.

The two main chemical compounds in cannabis are [THC](#) and [CBD](#).

- [THC](#) causes the intoxicating effect or 'high'.
- [CBD](#) does not cause intoxicating effects and may lessen some of the effects of THC.

Every cannabis product has different levels of THC and CBD. It's important to understand how much of both compounds are in cannabis products. *Higher levels of THC can be unsafe and are not suitable for everyone.*

Why is cannabis used?

Cannabis is used for recreational, wellness, and medicinal purposes.

[Recreationally](#), cannabis is used because of the intoxicating effect or the 'high' it produces, which is a result of the THC.

Cannabis can also be used for its [potentially therapeutic effects](#) both with and without a prescription. Some people use it to help manage nausea, loss of appetite, chronic pain, insomnia, or other conditions.

[Medicinal cannabis](#) has proven benefits for specific health conditions and is only obtained through a prescription from your health care provider. Cannabis used for wellness purposes does not have the same research evidence to support potential health claims.



What does cannabis do?

Using cannabis can have a range of effects.

The type of experience you have can vary from one drug-taking episode to another and will depend on the amount taken, the THC and CBD concentration in your cannabis product, frequency of use, and the method used to consume cannabis.

Some of the more desirable effects of using cannabis may include:

- Elevated mood
- Relaxation
- Heightened sensory experiences
- Increased appetite



While cannabis can temporarily elevate your mood and make you feel relaxed, ***you can also experience unpleasant effects such as:***

- Increased heart rate
- Nausea and vomiting
- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Balance and coordination issues
- Anxiety, fear, or panic

The effects of cannabis can be felt within seconds or up to a few hours and can last up to 24 hours depending on the dosage and method used to consume cannabis.



Do not take more of the product if you do not feel the effects right away, or you may risk taking too much.

Aging and cannabis

The effects of cannabis can increase as you get older. Normal changes in body fat and muscle mass as you age can slow down your body's ability to process cannabis. This means that the effects can be more intense and last longer.

These changes can also make you more sensitive to possible negative effects, such as:

- Impaired motor skills and balance that can increase your risk of falls and injuries
- Poor concentration and memory
- Negative interactions with your other medications
- Increased risk of developing mental health problems



Thinking about using cannabis?

If you are thinking about using cannabis, consider some of the safer use tips below:

Talk to your health provider

Before your appointment, write down questions you want to ask:

- ☐ Can cannabis help my particular condition?
- ☐ Will it interact with any of my medications?
- ☐ Are there any risks or side effects I should be aware of?
- ☐ How much will it cost and will my insurance cover it?
- ☐ Are there activities I should avoid while taking cannabis?
- ☐ What type and amount of cannabis would be best for me?

Thinking about using cannabis?

Buy legal

- Purchase cannabis from a licensed source.
- Look for products with low THC concentration (*ideally less than 10%*).

Start low and go slow

- Start by taking a very small amount and slowly increase the dose next time until the desired effect is reached.
- Allow some time for the effects to start (*it can take minutes to hours*); do not take more too soon!

Don't mix

- Never take cannabis with other drugs or alcohol.

Don't drive

- Cannabis may impair your ability to drive and increase your risk of having an accident. If you have used cannabis, wait at least 24 hours before driving.

Have more cannabis free days if using recreationally

- Limiting your use to occasional use, such as once a week, can reduce health risks.



When to call for help

Taking too much cannabis at once or taking cannabis with higher levels of THC can lead to side effects that require medical attention.

Signs to watch out for include:

- Anxiety
- Panic
- Elevated heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea and vomiting
- Paranoia and psychosis
(i.e.; *hallucinations and delusions*)



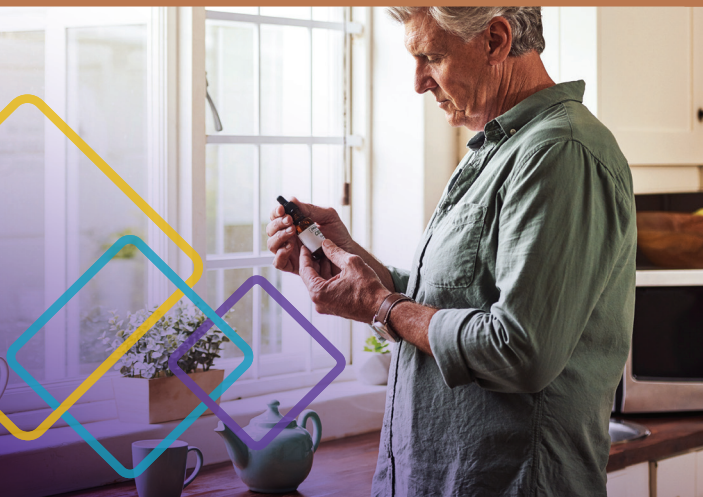
If you or someone you know has taken too much cannabis and is not feeling well, seek medical attention right away.



For more information,
visit the Canadian
Coalition for Seniors'
Mental Health (CCSMH)
website.



ccsmh.ca





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This brochure is adapted from the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH) Canadian Guideline on Cannabis Use Disorder Among Older Adults.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada. This brochure is intended for information purposes only. It is not intended to be interpreted or used as a standard of medical practice.

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