



# Cannabis and Cancer

For First Nations,  
Inuit, Métis and Urban  
Indigenous Peoples



**Ontario  
Health**

# Cannabis and Cannabinoids

## Information on cannabis and cannabinoids.



### What is cannabis?

- Cannabis is a type of plant and is sometimes called marijuana, pot or weed.
- Cannabis can be found in many forms and is used in different ways including:
  - Smoking its dried flowers, leaves, stems or seeds.
  - Breathing it in from a vaporizer or a vaping device, like an e-cigarette.
  - Eating or drinking it in foods or teas, often known as edibles.
  - Putting cannabis oils and capsules under the tongue or swallowing them.



### What are cannabinoids?

- Cannabinoids are the chemicals in cannabis that affect your brain and body.
- Two well-known cannabinoids are:
  1. CBD (cannabidiol) is a drug that does not give you a "high" feeling but may have other effects on the body.
  2. THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) is a drug that changes mood and the way the brain works. THC can give you a "high" feeling and THC can cause many other feelings you may not expect or want to feel.
- Medical cannabinoids are prescription drugs that are made from some of the chemicals found in cannabis.

# Effects of using cannabis

The best way to protect your health from the effects of cannabis is not to use cannabis.



## Short-term effects:

- Mental health problems, like feeling anxious or paranoid.
- Increased heart rate (heart beating faster than normal).
- Slower thoughts, body movement, and reactions to things happening to you and around you, which means you may not be able to drive and use other machines safely.



## Long-term effects:

Long-term effects are ones that develop over time with regular use over weeks, months or years. Some long-term effects of cannabis use are:

- Trouble breathing normally and a cough that lasts a long time or does not go away (if cannabis is smoked or vaped).
- Mental health problems, like schizophrenia and psychoses, which are mental illnesses that cause someone to lose touch with reality. You may be more likely to get these mental illnesses if you start to use cannabis before age 25.
- Addiction to using cannabis (feeling like you cannot stop using cannabis).



**Talk to your healthcare provider about the use of cannabis for medical reasons.**



## Can cannabis help cancer symptoms and cancer treatment side effects?

Cannabis and cannabinoids are not usually recommended as the first option for treating most health problems, including cancer symptoms or cancer treatment side effects.

If other recommended options do not work, some medical cannabinoids may help with the following cancer treatment side effects:

- Pain in people who are getting palliative care.
- Pain caused by nerve damage or other problems with the nervous system.
- Nausea (feeling like you might throw up) and throwing up caused by chemotherapy.

There is not enough research to show whether cannabis and medical cannabinoids may help other cancer symptoms and cancer treatment side effects.

## Medical cannabis:

The Government of Canada has regulations for people who use cannabis for treating certain health problems. To learn more, go to the Government of Canada's web page, [canada.ca/en/health-canada/topics/accessing-cannabis-for-medical-purposes.html](https://canada.ca/en/health-canada/topics/accessing-cannabis-for-medical-purposes.html)

You will need a medical document, like a prescription, from a doctor or nurse practitioner to get medical cannabis.

### Need this information in an accessible format?

1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511,

[info@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:info@ontariohealth.ca)

Document disponible en français en contactant

[info@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:info@ontariohealth.ca) | CQP-85350



Indigenous Tobacco Program  
[tobacchowise.com](http://tobacchowise.com)

# Cannabis and Cancer



## Key points to remember:

- Cannabis is not usually recommended for treating health problems. Cannabis does not treat cancer or lower the risk of getting cancer.
- There are two prescription drugs in Canada that are made up of chemicals found in cannabis called cannabinoids. In some cases, they may help with certain cancer symptoms or cancer treatment side effects when other recommended treatment options do not.
- When smoked or vaped, cannabis may cause problems with your breathing and lungs. Cannabis can also cause heart and mental health problems.
- More research is needed to find out whether cannabis can cause cancer.
- The best way to protect your health from the harms of cannabis is not to use cannabis.



## Did you know?

In Ontario...

- It is legal for people age 19 and older to buy and use cannabis from a licensed provider.
- It is illegal to drive under the influence of cannabis.
- It is illegal to take cannabis across the Canadian border.



For information on the Indigenous Tobacco Program and smoking cessation resources, visit [tobaccowise.com](https://tobaccowise.com)

## For more information about cannabis and cancer:

**Government of Ontario website:**

[ontario.ca/page/cannabis](https://ontario.ca/page/cannabis)

**Canadian Cancer Society website:**

[cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/diagnosis-and-treatment/complementary-therapies/medical-cannabis-and-cannabinoids](https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/diagnosis-and-treatment/complementary-therapies/medical-cannabis-and-cannabinoids)

**Government of Canada website:**

[canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis.html](https://canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis.html)

**Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines:**

[camh.ca/-/media/files/lrcug\\_professional-pdf](https://camh.ca/-/media/files/lrcug_professional-pdf)

**Disclaimer:**  
The information provided herein is intended for informational purposes only and is not intended to constitute or be a substitute for medical advice. This guide does not include all information about cannabis and cancer. Do not act or rely upon this information without seeking the advice of a qualified physician or other healthcare provider. Always ask your healthcare team if you have questions or concerns.



Indigenous Tobacco Program  
[tobaccowise.com](https://tobaccowise.com)



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