

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CANNABIS

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## What Is Cannabis?

Cannabis, also known as marijuana, is a plant that contains chemicals that act on your brain. The most common chemicals are called “THC” and “CBD.” When you smoke, vape, eat, or drink parts of the plant, the chemicals can change your mood and behavior and give you a “high” feeling. During the “high,” you may:

- Feel relaxed and intensely happy
- Experience heightened senses
- Feel hungrier than usual

In recent years, many states have passed laws making it easier to use cannabis. With this increase in access, more people are using cannabis than ever before.



matic stress disorder by using cannabis, their symptoms may actually worsen over time. In fact, cannabis use has been connected with more severe psychiatric disorders later in life.

## Does Cannabis Use Have Risks or Side Effects?

Unpleasant side effects of using cannabis may include:

- Paranoia and hallucinations
- Anxiety
- Impaired motor skills (including driving)
- Learning difficulties
- Memory loss
- Nausea and vomiting
- Red, bloodshot eyes
- Racing heartbeat

The strength of THC in cannabis has increased in recent years. This makes side effects and dependence more likely. Edible forms have especially unpredictable effects. Cannabis should not be used by pregnant or breastfeeding women.

People who use cannabis for a long time can require larger amounts. Some may struggle with addiction, feel unmotivated, and experience worsening psychiatric problems and more respiratory infections.

## Can Cannabis Treat Certain Medical Conditions?

Two chemicals found in cannabis have been approved to treat the nausea caused by chemotherapy and to increase appetite in patients with AIDS. The chemical CBD has been shown to prevent some types of seizures.

Some research shows that the cannabis plant and products made from it might help with chronic pain and can alleviate muscle stiffness from multiple sclerosis. However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has not approved the plant as a medicine. It remains illegal at the national level.

If you have a condition that you think cannabis could help, and you have exhausted approved treatment options, talk with your doctor about the risks and benefits of cannabis.

There is no strong evidence that cannabis can treat mental illness. Although some people get relief from anxiety, depression, and posttrau-

## What Should I Do if I Think I Have a Problem With Cannabis Use?

- Talk to your doctor if you think you have a problem with cannabis use. Contrary to popular belief, cannabis is both psychologically and physically addictive.
- There is a wide range of withdrawal symptoms, including insomnia, lack of appetite, anxiety, irritability, and restlessness.
- You may be at higher risk for cannabis use disorder if you have a family history of substance misuse, a personal history of substance use or sexual abuse, anxiety disorders, or antisocial behaviors.

## How Is Cannabis Use Disorder Diagnosed and Treated?

- Your doctor will ask you when and how often you use cannabis and other substances and what you find positive or negative about these patterns.
- You will have a psychiatric assessment, which will ideally include input from selected family, friends, and previous medical providers.
- Treatment is best done as an outpatient, although some patients need more intense support.
- Treatment usually includes behavioral therapy combined with medication.
- Treatment works best when done with a therapist or psychiatrist who has experience in substance use disorders.
- During treatment, it is important to avoid people, places, and things associated with your cannabis use to minimize triggers.
- Medicines are available to treat cravings, withdrawal symptoms, insomnia, depression, and anxiety, but there is no medicine to treat the disorder directly.

## Questions for My Doctor

- Is cannabis an option we should consider to safely treat my medical condition?
- What treatments are available to help me safely reduce or stop cannabis use?

## For More Information



**National Institute on Drug Abuse**  
[www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/marijuana](http://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/marijuana)  
**MedlinePlus**  
<https://medlineplus.gov/marijuana.html>