



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Cannabis

This information describes the common uses of Cannabis, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

What is it?

Cannabis, also known as marijuana, is used to treat some symptoms related to cancer. It's made from the flowers, leaves, and resin (sticky chemical) of the *Cannabis sativa* plant.

Cannabis comes in many forms, including vape pens, pills, lozenges, oils, teas, and powder. It isn't a prescription medication. It can be taken orally (by mouth), by smoking, or by vaporizing.

A licensed doctor or advanced practice provider (APP) must certify you if you want to buy **medical marijuana** from a registered dispensing facility (a place where medical marijuana is sold).

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Cannabis is used to:

- Reduce pain
- Treat glaucoma (eye disease that causes vision loss and blindness)

- Treat nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up) and vomiting (throwing up) due to cancer treatments
- Treat sleep disorders
- Treat epilepsy (a brain disorder that causes people to have seizures)
- Treat multiple sclerosis (disease that can cause problems with vision, balance, and muscle control)
- Treat mood disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder, and seasonal affective disorder
- Increase appetite

Cannabis also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

Talk with your healthcare providers before taking cannabis. It can interact with some medications and affect how they work. For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of taking cannabis products may include:

- Drowsiness (feeling sleepy)
- Restlessness (feeling like you can't relax or get comfortable)
- Anxiety (strong feelings of worry or fear)
- Paranoia (intense thoughts or feelings that someone might try to harm you)
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there)
- Feeling hungry
- Short-term memory loss
- Euphoria (feeling very happy or excited)
- Trouble focusing
- Changes in your blood pressure

- Faster heart rate
- Confusion
- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Flushing (when your skin becomes red or warm)
- Depression (strong feelings of sadness)
- Insomnia (trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early)

If you're worried about any of these side effects, talk with your healthcare provider.

What else do I need to know?

Don't take cannabis products if:

- You have kidney, heart, or liver disease. Cannabis may make these worse.
- You have psychiatric illnesses that affect mood, thinking, and behavior. Cannabis may make these conditions worse.
- You're taking nivolumab (Opdivo®). Cannabis can lower the response to this medication in patients with advanced melanoma, non-small-cell lung cancer, and renal clear cell carcinoma.
- You're taking warfarin (Jantoven® or Coumadin®) or other blood thinners. Cannabis can increase your risk of bleeding.
- You're taking fluoxetine (Prozac®) or disulfiram (Antabuse®). Taking cannabis with these medications can cause confusion, elevated mood, inflated self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, racing thoughts, and trouble focusing.
- You're on amphetamines (Adzenys XR-ODT, Evekeo ODT). Heart damage may occur with cannabis
- You're taking atropine (Atropen®). Taking this medication and cannabis can cause heart damage.

- You're on cocaine. Heart damage may occur with cannabis
- You're taking pseudoephedrine (such as Sudafed®), epinephrine (such as Auvi-Q®) or the prescription drug dobutamine (Dobutamine). Taking these medications and cannabis can cause heart damage.
- You're taking medication that helps you sleep such as lorazepam (Ativan®), diazepam (Valium®), or zolpidem (Ambien®). Taking these medications and cannabis can increase drowsiness.

Don't give cannabis products to children with epilepsy who are on clobazam (Onfi®). Cannabis can increase its side effects

Don't use [medical marijuana](#) for anything other than managing your cancer-related symptoms. Non-medical use of cannabis is illegal under federal law.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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