

Questions about  
**CANNABIS**  
and the answers that may  
**SURPRISE YOU**

A booklet for people thinking  
about starting medical cannabis



You have received this booklet because you are wondering if medical cannabis (sometimes called medical marijuana) could help you.

- Cannabis is a plant. The buds (or flowers) of this plant contain over 100 substances called “cannabinoids”.
- It is believed that when people use cannabis, it is the cannabinoids that cause its effects.
- THC and CBD<sup>▼see below</sup> are currently the most well-understood of all cannabinoids; however, there is still much we do not understand.

You may have heard of...

**PRESCRIPTION CANNABINOIDS (oral)**  
THC and/or CBD as capsules, sprays or solutions available by prescription (e.g. nabilone, nabiximols)



**VAPORIZED CANNABIS (inhaled)**  
dried cannabis which is heated and inhaled



**CANNABIS OIL (oral)**  
cannabis extracts as oils that can be swallowed



**SMOKED CANNABIS (inhaled)**  
not usually recommended  
see page 6 for side effects specific to smoking cannabis



- Doctors may authorize one of the above products for medical use if they think it may help you. However, they will be assessing the potential for benefit versus harm.
- In Canada, some forms of cannabis are legal and regulated for adult recreational use - a different purpose than described in this booklet.

Other products include: creams, teas, cookies, candies, and many more.

▼ THC= delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol; CBD=cannabidiol

Can you tell which of these are **FACTS**, and which are **MYTHS**?

1. Cannabis works better than most medications.
2. It's hard to fatally overdose on cannabis.
3. Some types of cannabis don't have side effects.
4. Cannabis has a low risk of addiction.

## 1. Cannabis works better than most medications.

### This is a myth.

For many illnesses, cannabis either hasn't been studied, or the existing studies were not designed very well. This means we don't have much confidence from science that cannabis is helpful.

Cannabis also hasn't been compared to existing medications. Since we understand existing medications so much better than cannabis, it makes sense to try all of our standard therapies first before trying cannabis, including prescription cannabinoids.

When a decision is made to start cannabis, we call it a "trial". This is because if it doesn't work for you or it hurts you, it makes sense to stop it.

## 2. It's hard to fatally overdose on cannabis.

### This is a fact.

So far there haven't been any reported overdose deaths from cannabis. But this doesn't mean that cannabis is perfectly safe.

You may already know about some of the possible side effects with cannabis, such as feeling "high", mood changes, memory problems, drowsiness, and numbness. Almost everyone who starts cannabis will get at least one side effect (although they won't necessarily stop using it.)

Even though there have been no reported fatal overdoses, using cannabis in excess will cause impairment and threaten your safety. See page 6 of this booklet for more details about side effects.

## 3. Some types of cannabis don't have side effects.

### This is a myth.

Some types of cannabis, such as those with high levels of CBD, are advertised as "nonpsychoactive", or not affecting the brain ... but this is somewhat misleading. Studies show that CBD can still cause drowsiness, dizziness and mood changes (even if it won't get you "high".)

When smoked, cannabis can damage your lungs and make it harder to breathe. It also contains toxic chemicals that may cause cancer.

There really is no such thing as a "safe" type of cannabis. That's why it's usually best to make sure other therapies have been tried first, including prescription cannabinoids.

## 4. Cannabis has a low risk of addiction.

### This is a myth.

The addiction rate with cannabis in adults is around 1 in 10. If cannabis is started as a teenager, it's even higher with a rate of 1 in 6.

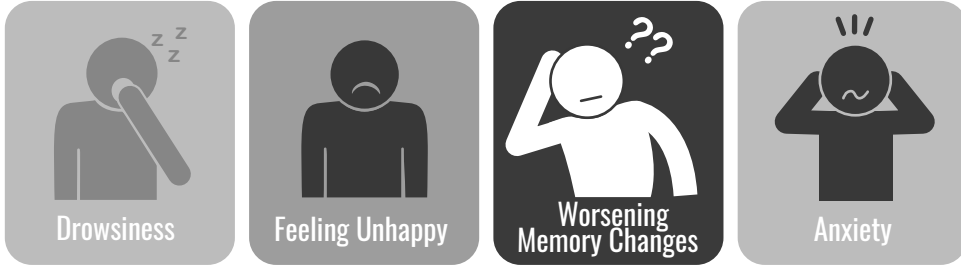
Even people who use cannabis on the advice of their doctor can become addicted to it, through no fault of their own. This is one reason why health care workers are sometimes reluctant to recommend cannabis. It's possible some forms of cannabis are not as addictive as others, although this hasn't been well studied.

When cannabis is suddenly stopped, many people will experience cravings for cannabis. This can be uncomfortable and make it hard to stop cannabis. Usually if cannabis needs to be stopped, it's best to do so slowly in a gradual taper.

# Some Side Effects of Using Cannabis

Yes, cannabis is a natural, plant-based substance. But this does not mean it is harmless.

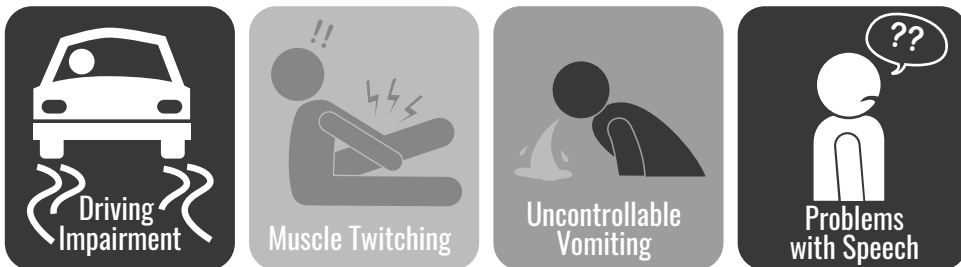
CANNABIS CAN IMPACT THE BRAIN ...



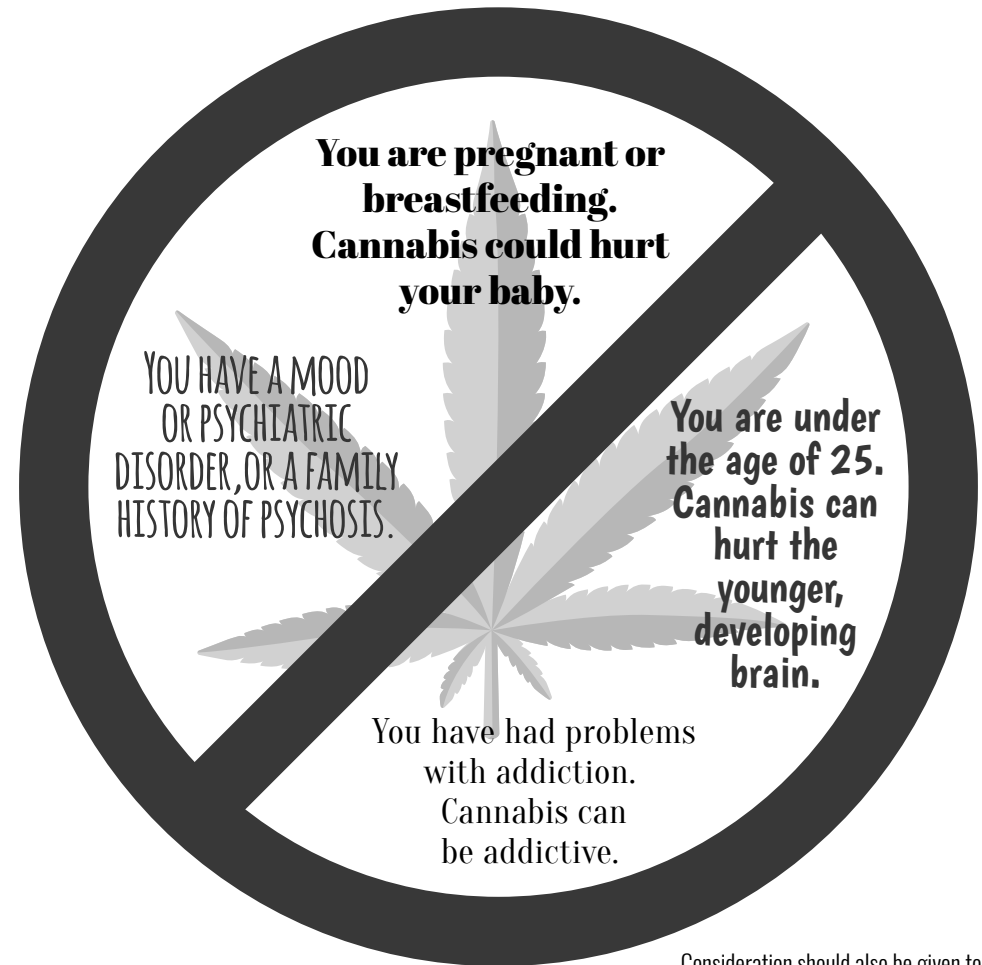
AND CANNABIS SMOKE CONTAINS TOXIC CHEMICALS...



AND SOME POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF CANNABIS MAY SURPRISE YOU!



YOU SHOULD AVOID CANNABIS IF...



# Treating Illness from More Than One Direction

HAVING AN ILLNESS IS LIKE HAVING A CAR WITH FOUR FLAT TIRES...

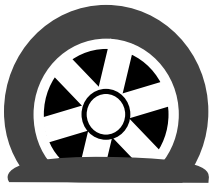
IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO JUST FILL UP ONE TIRE. ALL FOUR TIRES MUST BE FILLED BEFORE THE CAR CAN MOVE FORWARD.



You may be hoping that cannabis will help with your health condition.

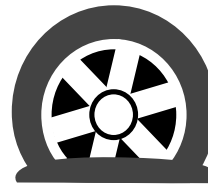
It is important to remember that medications (including cannabis) are only one part of treating an illness.

Your health care provider will have ideas on the best way to fill each flat tire for your health condition.



## PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY

This includes things like progressive relaxation and cognitive behavioural therapy. These types of treatments help you cope with an illness and be less troubled by its symptoms.



## SELF MANAGEMENT

Self management means being gentle with yourself: eating healthy, getting enough sleep, seeing friends, exploring spirituality, and so on.

## PHYSICAL THERAPY AND ACTIVITY

Exercise helps nearly every single health condition. While it may seem hard at first, starting slowly and gradually building up activity can be done, and will make a big difference in a person's life.



## MEDICATION

Medication usually means prescription drugs. Sometimes it may even mean cannabis. It is important to remember that medications are typically just one part of treating a health condition.



**For our best chance of success, we must tackle a problem from as many directions as possible!**

*"I tried pot and I know it works for me."*

Sometimes people report that they've tried cannabis, and they like the effects they experienced. But sometimes cannabis is only tricking someone into thinking it's helping.

## HOW COULD THIS BE?

*"Could cannabis be tricking me?"*



*AM I USING CANNABIS TO TREAT MY PROBLEMS...  
OR AVOID MY PROBLEMS?*

*HOW DO MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY FEEL  
ABOUT MY USE OF CANNABIS?*

## IF YOU DO USE CANNABIS...

**DON'T rely on cannabis alone for your treatment.**

For more information on this see pages 8 & 9 of this booklet.

**DO try other medications first.**

Cannabis is usually low on the list of options to try.

**DO let your health care providers know right away about any side effects.**

For more information on this see page 6 of this booklet.

**DON'T drive after using cannabis.**

THC roughly doubles your risk of a car crash.

**DON'T combine cannabis with alcohol.**

The side effects of these two drugs add together.

**DO let all of your health care providers know that you are using cannabis.**

This will help keep you safe. Even if your health care provider doesn't think cannabis is a good choice for you, it is still important for them to be aware you are using it. For example, cannabis can interact with other drugs you may be taking. This could create a harmful effect.

# DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT USING CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES?

***Have you used cannabis in the past?  
Or are you thinking about starting to use it for the first time?***

***This booklet was written to help guide you through the complex topic of medical therapy with cannabis.***

## LOOK INSIDE FOR

**facts and myths what to expect tips  
and pitfalls side effects and more...**

1. Allan GM et al. Simplified guideline for prescribing medical cannabinoids in primary care. CFP. 2018; 64(2):111-20.
2. College of Family Physicians of Canada. Authorizing dried cannabis for chronic pain or anxiety: preliminary guidance. 2014.
3. Volkow ND et al. Adverse health effects of marijuana use. NEJM. 2014; 370(23):2219-27.
4. Epidiolex® product monograph. Greenwich Biosciences Inc. June 2018.
5. Fischer B et al. Lower-risk cannabis use guidelines: a comprehensive update of evidence and recommendations. Am J Public Health. 2017;107(8):e1-2.

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