



Important information about medical cannabis

Treatment using cannabis is still being researched

Existing studies show using cannabis products may or may not result in an improvement in your condition. The Food and Drug Administration has not approved cannabis use to treat medical conditions, and cannabis remains a federally illegal substance. However, healthcare providers in Utah are legally allowed to recommend cannabis for use by qualifying patients under state law. Cannabis is a term that refers to a variety of plants. Medical cannabis refers to specific chemicals obtained from a cannabis plant that may be medically helpful for some patients. The primary ingredients in medical cannabis that will be contained in products approved for use in Utah are THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (cannabidiol).

Common side effects

The most common side effects of using medical cannabis products are dizziness, fatigue, dry mouth, lightheadedness, drowsiness, and nausea. Side effects are usually mild to moderate in severity and last only a few hours, but sometimes severe side effects occur. A person's response to medical cannabis can depend on many things, such as the amount of THC and/or CBD in the product and other medications the person is taking. You should not take medical cannabis with other medications and/or substances that may cause drowsiness. Substances that may cause drowsiness include alcohol, sleep medicines, and antihistamines. If you have questions about side effects, contact a pharmacist at the medical cannabis pharmacy where you purchased the product, your recommending healthcare provider, or the Utah Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Start low, go slow

Every patient reacts differently to the chemicals in cannabis, specifically THC and/or CBD, so it is best to start with a low amount of cannabis and then increase the amount slowly over time until symptoms are relieved or side effects develop. Pharmacists at the medical cannabis pharmacies will follow this “start low, go slow” approach. Talk to the pharmacist at a medical cannabis pharmacy or your recommending healthcare provider about the best form and amount of medical cannabis for you and what to do if side effects occur. You may want to purchase a smaller supply of medical cannabis during your first few visits to a medical cannabis pharmacy until you learn how you respond to a particular cannabis product.

Tell your healthcare providers about the medical cannabis product(s) you are using

Medical cannabis may interfere with other drugs you are taking. Make sure to tell all of your healthcare providers about the medical cannabis products you are taking. Your healthcare providers may need to conduct blood tests or adjust the amounts of other medications you are taking. It is especially important to tell all of your healthcare providers when you are going to receive anesthesia or major sedation in an office or operating room. Cannabis use can increase the amounts of the medications you may need for sedation or anesthesia.

Medical cannabis and other medications

Do not take cannabis if you are taking Cilostazol (Pletal), Clopidogrel (Plavix), Clobazam (Onfi or Sympazan), or Citalopram (Celexa). Several other medications will require careful monitoring by your recommending healthcare provider; Warfarin (Coumadin) is one such medication. Be sure to talk to your recommending healthcare provider about other medications you are taking.

Risk of impairment when driving and operating machinery

Using medical cannabis can affect perception, reaction time, motor skills, and attention in ways that make it dangerous to drive or operate machinery. The length and severity of this kind of impairment change from patient to patient and depend on multiple factors. Impairment is more common when taking medical cannabis products with higher THC content. Drinking alcohol while taking medical cannabis worsens the impairment.

Risk of dependence and addiction

Using medical cannabis could lead to cannabis dependence. The risk of developing a cannabis-use problem is higher with products that are higher in THC content, and for people who already have a substance use disorder or have had one in the past. Medical cannabis should be used with caution and with input from your healthcare provider, especially if you have a substance use disorder. Among heavy, regular users of cannabis products (whether or not they are medical), stopping use abruptly can lead to withdrawal symptoms. The risk of withdrawal symptoms for medical cannabis products varies by product content (THC and/or CBD) and amount.

Risk of excessive vomiting

In rare instances, cannabis use can carry the risk of excessive, severe vomiting, daily nausea, and abdominal pain that repeats in a 1 to 3 week cycle. If you experience these symptoms, you should stop using the cannabis product and contact your healthcare provider.

Risk for use by persons with heart or liver disease

Use medical cannabis with caution if you have heart or liver disease. Cannabis use could cause a heart attack in patients known to have heart disease. Cannabis use increases heart rate and lowers blood pressure. This can result in harmful effects in patients with heart

disease. Liver disease could cause problems with how the body uses and processes cannabis, affecting the safety and potency of medical cannabis.

Risk for use by individuals younger than age 22

People under the age of 22 may have a higher risk of harm from cannabis use. There is evidence that cannabis use during the active period of brain development can lead to permanent brain damage. There is also an association between the use of cannabis in this age group and developing mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia. The younger a person is when they start using cannabis, the more likely they are to develop a cannabis use disorder.

Risk for use by women who are pregnant or breastfeeding

Women who are pregnant, are planning to get pregnant, or are breastfeeding should talk to a healthcare provider before using cannabis. There is evidence that using cannabis while pregnant can cause harm to the developing baby, such as low birth weight, premature birth, and/or brain damage (as noted above). Cannabis use by a mother while breastfeeding can transfer the chemicals in cannabis to the infant through the breast milk and could cause harm to the infant.

Risk of mental illness

Cannabis use may be associated with severe periods of mental illness (psychotic episodes) and frequent, recurring periods of mental illness (psychotic disease). This risk appears to be higher with cannabis products that have higher amounts of THC and lower amounts of CBD. There is evidence that cannabis use adds to the risk of developing psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia – especially in people who also have other risk factors. A family history of schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders can put you at higher risk. For that reason, cannabis should not be used or should be used with great caution in patients with a family history of psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia.

Keep medications secure and in their original containers

Medical cannabis products may look like common household products, as well as other medications, making it easy to accidentally consume a medical cannabis product. When medications are not in their original containers, it is easier to mix up the identity of a medication. As with any medication, medical cannabis should be kept in a secure place where others, especially children, cannot access it. Please remember that edible cannabis products that are designed to look like other food items, such as cookies or brownies, are not allowed under Utah law. If you have concerns about a child or adult who accidentally consumed cannabis in any form, call the Utah Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Use medical cannabis legally

Under Utah law, medical cannabis may only be used in a legal form. Smoking or burning cannabis products for inhalation is not a legal form. However, a medical cannabis cardholder can warm their medical cannabis into vapor for inhalation without the use of a flame (vaping). Please remember that the Utah Indoor Clean Air Act prohibits vaping in all indoor places of public access, publicly owned buildings, offices, and many publicly accessible outdoor areas. The only exception to vaping medical cannabis in these prohibited indoor places and outdoor areas is to treat a serious medical emergency.

Do not sell, resell, or gift medical cannabis

In Utah, sharing medical cannabis is a crime, and can result in criminal charges, civil monetary penalties, or expulsion from the Utah Medical Cannabis Program. Under Utah law, it is illegal for a medical cannabis cardholder to sell or gift cannabis products, cannabis devices, or cannabis residue to another person