



Addictions &
Mental Health
Ontario

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Ontario Centre of Excellence
for Child and Youth
Mental Health

CLEARING THE AIR:

Informing conversations about cannabis for child and youth mental health and addictions service providers

CHAPTER 1:

What is cannabis?



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What is cannabis?

Cannabis is a substance that is made from the *Cannabis sativa* and *Cannabis indica* plants. It is the greenish or brownish parts of the dried flowers, fruiting tops and leaves of the cannabis plant. Cannabis is commonly known as “*marijuana*”. Other street names for cannabis include “*weed*”, “*pot*”, “*herb*”, “*ganja*”, “*grass*”, “*Mary Jane*” and “*reefer*”.

Cannabis can be consumed in several ways, including¹ but not limited to:

- smoking as a cigarette (also known as a joint, spliff or a blunt) or through a pipe or bong
- vaping through an e-cigarette
- ingesting an edible form that is mixed into a drink or food, such as tea, brownies, gummies and candies
- ingesting a cannabis tincture, which is an alcohol-based extract used on its own or added to food or drinks
- inhaled after heating (also known as dabbing) oil, wax, or a substance called *shatter* that is made from cannabis resin or hashish, which is the dried resinous secretion of the flowering tops of the cannabis plant

LOOKING FOR SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE MEDICAL USE OF CANNABIS?

Medical cannabis is intended for those authorized by Health Canada to possess cannabis for medical purposes.

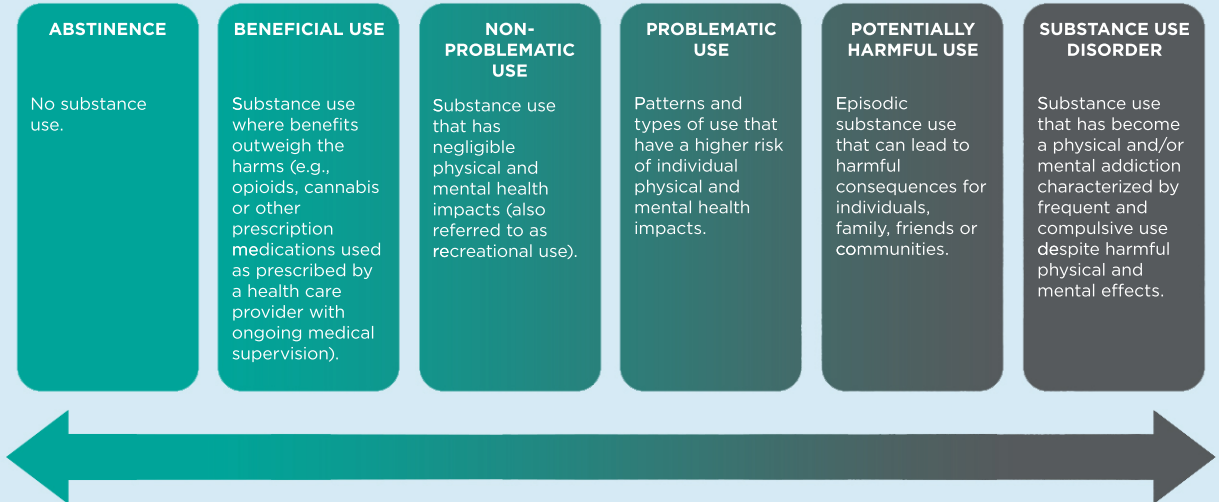
This **DOCUMENT** by Health Canada is a medical factsheet covers the technical details of cannabis including what the product does, when it should not be used, signs of an overdose, side effects and risks of long term use.



CHAPTER 1:

What is cannabis?

Different people use cannabis differently, both in terms of volume and frequency. Cannabis use can be represented across the following spectrum².



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What is cannabis?

Cannabis can have a range of physical, mental and cognitive impacts on the human body that **can vary from being therapeutic to psychoactive**. There are several types of cannabis, made up of chemical compounds called “cannabinoids”.

The two main cannabinoids are known as 1) tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and 2) cannabidiol (CBD). Both are used for several purposes and cause various effects³:

		Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)	Cannabidiol (CBD)
Therapeutic effects	Anti-inflammatory	Yes	Yes
	Anti-convulsant	Yes	Yes
	Muscle relaxant	Yes	Yes
	Psychotropic	Yes	No
	Antipsychotic	No	Yes
	Short-term memory problems	Yes	No
	Distortion of perception of time	Yes	No
	Antiemetic	Yes	Yes
	Sedation	Yes	Yes
Psychoactive effect		Main cannabinoid that produces the “high” feeling young people using cannabis experience.	Known to counteract some of the effects of THC; it does not produce the “high” feeling.

CHAPTER 2:

Cannabis and related legislation



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Cannabis can be used both medically and non-medically. If used **medically**, cannabis use has been authorized by a health care professional and the cannabis product in use has been registered with a Health Canada approved licensed producer⁴. Medical cannabis use is typically intended to improve quality of life by managing physical and mental health issues, while protecting overall health⁵.

Non-medical cannabis use is the use of cannabis that has not been authorized for use by a health care professional. People may use cannabis non-medically in social contexts to improve their quality of life or to help themselves relax, concentrate or make activities more enjoyable (e.g., eating, listening to music, watching movies)⁵ while achieving the feeling of a “high”. This is also known as recreational use, where cannabis is used without medical justification.

On October 17, 2018, the use of non-medical use of Cannabis was legalized across Canada. Cannabis for medical use has always been legal prior to this date. No changes to medical cannabis use have occurred because of the legalization of non-medical cannabis use.

Health Canada continues to provide patients with reasonable access to cannabis for medical purposes. Individuals can continue to purchase cannabis directly from a federally licensed producer, register to produce a limited amount of cannabis for their own medical purposes and/or designate someone to produce it for them⁶.

Here are more **FACTS** on what you need to know about cannabis in Canada.



CHAPTER 2:

Cannabis and related legislation

In Ontario, the minimum age to buy, use, possess and grow cannabis is 19 years. For recreational use, individuals in Ontario can⁷:

- possess up to 30 grams of legal cannabis
- share up to 30 grams of legal cannabis with other adults (not youth)
- purchase dried or fresh cannabis and cannabis oil from a provincially-licensed retailer
- grow from licensed seed or seedlings, up to 4 cannabis plants per residence for personal use
- make cannabis products (such as food and drinks) at home if organic solvents are not used to create concentrated products

It is important to note that edibles in Ontario will not be legal until Fall 2019. Every province, territory, or Indigenous community across Canada can set their own legal minimum age, where cannabis can be purchased and used, and how much cannabis an individual can possess⁷.

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CANNABIS?

Check out this **RESOURCE** that outlines:

- what cannabis is
- what the new regulations mean for youth
- how to recognize risks
- how to help the youth you work with

This resource provides facts and statistics that are specific to Ontario and contains a full list of references and links to get more information and further help. It is intended for parents, guardians and caregivers of youth in grades 6 to 12.



CHAPTER 3:

Using cannabis medically



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Using cannabis medically

The new legislation provides guidelines around possession for medical use. **Authorized individuals (both adults and young persons) can possess the lower amount between⁸:**

- a) 30 times the daily amount specified on that individual's prescription (i.e., a one-month supply) **or**;
- b) 150 grams of dried cannabis

In Canada, cannabis is medically approved for⁹:

- relief and prevention of nausea and vomiting caused by anti-cancer and anti-HIV chemotherapy
- stimulation of appetite in AIDS patients with a severe loss of body weight
- the relief of neuropathic pain (i.e., pain due to disease of the nervous system), pain and spasticity (muscle stiffness) due to multiple sclerosis, and of severe pain due to advanced cancer

Cannabis has been found to address symptoms across many other medical conditions, including:

Condition	Benefit
Multiple sclerosis	Reduced muscle spasms, tremors and muscle contractions ^{10,11}
Cancer	Reduced pain during chemotherapy ¹²
Chronic pain (e.g. fibromyalgia)	Reduced pain ¹²
Diabetes mellitus	Reduced "neuropathic pain" ¹²
Rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, other acute and chronic musculoskeletal pain	Reduced pain ¹²
Seizure disorders	Reduced frequency of seizures ¹¹

Here is a **RESOURCE** that details specific health effects of cannabis and cannabinoids.



CHAPTER 4:

Cannabis, mental health and the brain



CHAPTER 4:

Cannabis, mental health and the brain

Although cannabis has many beneficial medical effects, it is important to know that most of this evidence comes either from case studies or from research studies with a small number of participants. This means that many of these findings may not be applicable to a broad range of people.

As such, it is important to understand that **cannabis can also negatively affect the human body**. Frequent cannabis use over an extended period of time has been associated with several psychological and substance use disorders^{13,14,15}. Some common conditions are:

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RISKS AND HEALTH EFFECTS OF CANNABIS?

Looking for information specific to youth between 13 to 17 years? Click [HERE!](#)

Looking for information specific to youth between 18 to 25 years? Click [HERE!](#)



Condition	Relationships
Mood disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• frequent cannabis use has been found to increase the occurrence of mood disorders among those who started using cannabis at ages younger than 18 years^{12,13,16,17}• mood disorder symptoms can worsen for those who continue to use cannabis after an official diagnosis¹⁸
Anxiety disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• frequent cannabis use (especially during adolescence) has been linked to an onset of anxiety disorders^{13,18,19}• symptoms of anxiety can worsen for those who continue to use cannabis after an official diagnosis¹⁸
Psychosis and schizophrenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cannabis use in youth has been found to cause a subsequent diagnosis of schizophrenia or schizophreniform disorder^{13,12}• frequent cannabis use, or the regular use of high THC products, can increase the risk of developing psychosis and schizophrenia (this is especially true among individuals with pre-existing risks for these conditions)²⁰• individuals who use cannabis frequently also experience increased psychotic symptoms, respond more poorly to neuroleptic medications, have poorer treatment compliance and poorer clinical outcomes, experience more relapses and have more hospital admissions than those who do not use cannabis²⁰

CHAPTER 4:

Cannabis, mental health and the brain

Many individuals **begin to use cannabis as adolescents** where youth face several challenges in their personal, educational and social lives. This is an important developmental stage, where the developing brain undergoes significant changes, raising the possibility that **repeated exposure to cannabinoids (i.e., using a THC strain of cannabis as an adolescent) may have an effect on brain functions and behaviors that persists into adulthood**²¹. Some of these effects are:

	Short term difficulties	Long term difficulties
Short term use	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• impaired judgment• poor motor coordination• compromised driving skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• impaired judgment• poor motor coordination• compromised driving skills
Frequent/chronic use	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• increased brain activity, especially in frontal regions, which means that the brain might have to work harder when completing academic and job-related tasks• delayed reaction/response time• decreased attention span• poor decision-making skills• poor memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• disruptions in normal brain development such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- lower brain volumes- different brain folding patterns- thinning cortex of the brain- poor neural connectivity- low white matter integrity• slowed processing speed (i.e., the ability to focus attention)

Unknown effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cannabis use can cause short-term difficulties with memory, attention and executive function²² however the frequency and potency of cannabis use that causes these effects is not known• the extent of cognitive deficits from exposure to cannabis are not clear

CHAPTER 5:

Approaching cannabis use



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Legalization of cannabis is not meant to promote cannabis use. Just because cannabis is legal, doesn't mean it *has* to be used. Whether youth have used cannabis only once or do so on a regular basis, service providers need to be able to discuss cannabis use with their young adult (19+ years) clients. This **includes talking about both harms and benefits of cannabis, along with general harm reduction strategies.**

First, you need to provide a safe, non-judgmental environment that enables an open-dialogue and screen for cannabis use.

Wondering how to properly communicate with youth on all things related to cannabis?

Here are some resources on how to talk to young people about cannabis:

NOT SURE WHAT TO SAY TO YOUTH CLIENTS ABOUT CANNABIS?

Check out this screening **RESOURCE!**



HOW DO YOU TALK TO TEENAGERS ABOUT CANNABIS?

This **RESOURCE** helps families navigate the new cannabis landscape and provides parents with information about how to have an open dialogue with their pre-teen or teen.



LOOKING FOR A CANNABIS COMMUNICATION GUIDE?

This **GUIDE** helps people who work with youth to have safe, unbiased, informed and non-judgmental conversations about cannabis.



CHAPTER 5:

Approaching cannabis use

It is okay to say “no” to cannabis use. Make sure youth are informed of their choices on cannabis use.

CANADA'S LOWER-RISK CANNABIS USE GUIDELINES

This [DOCUMENT](#) outlines 10 recommendations for using recreational cannabis safely.



USEFUL TIPS ABOUT SAFER WAYS TO USE CANNABIS

This [RESOURCE](#) helps youth reduced the risks to their physical and mental health if they choose to use cannabis.



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CANNABIS USE AND YOUTH

This [RESOURCE](#) helps parents become aware of the risks associated with cannabis and help make decisions about cannabis use or non-use in the context of their family.



STAYING UP TO DATE ON CANNABIS-RELATED INFORMATION

This [RESOURCE](#) helps individuals stay in-the-know about cannabis, its side effects, and its risk factors.

Click [HERE](#) for more resources to help you better understand about cannabis use in Canada



CHAPTER 5:

Approaching cannabis use

If not you, then who? In addition to talking with you as a service provider, how else can youth get help around cannabis use?

KIDSHELPPHONE

This service allows people to enter their location (city or town) then choose a topic they are looking to find resources for. The app then provides a list of resources in the area. Clicking on a specific resource then gives information about cost, age limits, eligibility, accessibility and languages offered.



GOOD2TALK

This is a free, confidential helpline for post-secondary students to receive information and referrals on services and supports for mental health, addictions and well-being.



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