

Cannabis and Older Adults

December 15, 2021



Although some Canadians have been able to access medical cannabis since 1999, recreational cannabis has only been legal in Canada since October 17, 2018.^{1,2} Since that landmark, people 65+ are the fastest growing group of cannabis users.³

Note that each province and territory has their own rules regarding the sale and possession of cannabis products, so it is important to familiarize yourself with the cannabis laws in your province or territory.⁴

Ways of using cannabis and their effects

Smoking cannabis is the most harmful way to use it because it directly impacts a person's lungs. If you choose to smoke cannabis, try not to inhale deeply or hold your breath because this increases the amount of toxins you take in, and can lead to lung problems. Safer alternatives include vaping or using edibles, but they also pose health risks.⁵

Ingesting cannabis involves the consumption of food or drinks that contain cannabinoids. The effects are more intense and last longer because it takes a long time for the body to absorb THC after ingesting it. It can take 30 minutes to 2 hours to feel the effects, which peaks at 4 hours. This means it will be in the body for longer than it would when smoking cannabis. It is also important to carefully read the label.⁶

Cannabis extract can also be incorporated into other products such as sprays, salves and creams.⁷

What are cannabinoids?

Cannabinoids are chemical compounds found in cannabis that impact a person's mind and body when consumed.⁶ Over 70 different cannabinoids have been identified, and each have different effects on the body.²

The two main types of cannabinoids found in cannabis are:

- **THC (tetrahydrocannabinol):** THC is responsible for the intoxicating effects of cannabis.
- **CBD (cannabidiol):** CBD does not make a person feel intoxicated, but may have therapeutic effects. More research is needed to confirm its potential medical use.⁶

To learn more:



Behavioural Supports Ontario's guide, [Cannabis and Older Adults: Know the Facts](#), is filled with facts and resources, and answers many common questions about cannabis use.

www.behaviouralsupportsontario.ca



The Government of Canada's [Cannabis in Canada page](#) provides information about cannabis laws, medical access and health effects. Learn about different regulations across the country.



The [Arthritis Society's website](#) has information and resources about medical cannabis, including research and e-learning modules about its effects on treating arthritis.

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Risks involved with cannabis use

People's response to cannabis can be different each time they use it. The effects of cannabis also differ based on: age, sex, amount of THC or CBD in a product, pre-existing medical conditions and/or the consumption of other drugs, alcohol, or food. Cannabis can also cause drowsiness, which can impair a person's concentration, reflexes and coordination.⁸

Although cannabis causes feelings of euphoria, it can cause panic, anxiety, and in some cases, paranoia or hallucinations. Avoid the use of cannabis if you have or are at risk for developing psychosis, schizophrenia, or problematic substance use. Long term effects of frequent cannabis use include; breathing problems if cannabis is smoked, increased dependence, and the development or worsening of anxiety or depression. This risk is further increased with the use of products that contain higher levels of THC.⁸

If you are thinking about using cannabis, consider talking to your doctor about the potential risks and benefits for you and how it may interact with any existing conditions you might have.

****This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not to be considered medical advice.***

References

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About CanAge

CanAge is Canada's National Seniors' Advocacy organization.

We are a non-partisan non-profit organization that educates, empowers and mobilizes people on the issues that matter most to older Canadians and their caregivers.

We work to advance the rights and well-being of Canadians as we age in order to live vibrant and connected lives.

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