

# Medical Cannabis Safety Guide

## Cannabis Treatment Is Still Being Researched

While existing studies on cannabis products show that cannabis could be beneficial when treating a variety of conditions, it has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration and is still a federally illegal substance. However, under Utah state law, healthcare providers may recommend Medical Cannabis use for those who qualify.

## Common Side Effects May Occur

Some of the most common side effects that occur with Medical Cannabis use are dizziness, fatigue, dry mouth, lightheadedness, drowsiness, and nausea. These are typically mild to moderate in severity but can be severe in rare cases. One person's response to Medical Cannabis is dependent on many things, such as THC content and existing medications in the bloodstream. It's not recommended to combine Medical Cannabis with medications that cause drowsiness. If you experience any side effects or have any questions, contact your Medical Cannabis Pharmacist, Qualified Medical Provider, or the Utah Poison Control Center at 1.800.222.1222.

## Start Low, Go Slow

Cannabis is not like traditional prescription medication. Every patient reacts differently to the chemicals in cannabis, specifically THC and/or CBD, so it's important to remember to "start low and go slow." Start with a low dose of cannabis and slowly increase the amount over time until you feel symptom relief or undesirable side effects. (Ask your friendly neighborhood UTTHC staff member for more information on finding your just-right dose!)

## Be Open with Your Healthcare Providers

Medical Cannabis may interfere with medication you are already taking. Make sure to be completely transparent and

open with each of your healthcare providers about your cannabis use so that they can keep an eye on any changes to your treatment. This is especially important to disclose when going under anesthesia or major sedation. Always disclose your cannabis treatment with any healthcare provider whose treatment you are also under.

## Use Medical Cannabis Legally

Medical Cannabis Cardholders are only authorized to consume cannabis in a legal form. Smoking or burning cannabis for inhalation purposes is not authorized. Patients can warm their cannabis products with a vaporizer if they prefer to inhale. The Utah Indoor Clean Air Act prohibits vaping in all indoor public spaces and many publicly accessible outdoor areas. The only exception to vaping Medical Cannabis in these areas is to treat a serious medical emergency.

## No Sharing

Sharing Medical Cannabis is a crime and can result in criminal charges, civil monetary penalties, or expulsion from the Utah Medical Cannabis Program. It's also illegal for a Medical Cannabis Cardholder to sell or gift cannabis products, cannabis devices, or cannabis residue to another person.

## Keep Medications Safe & Labeled

Because Medical Cannabis can look similar to common household products or other medications, it's easy to mistake cannabis for something else and should be kept out of reach of children and those without a qualified recommendation. If you have concerns about a child or adult who has accidentally consumed cannabis, call the Utah Poison Control Center at 1.800.222.1222. Products must be kept in their original packaging with prescription labels attached. UTTHC also recommends using a locking, smell proof container.

Like any medication or treatment, there are risks involved with regular cannabis use. Familiarizing yourself with them early can help ensure consistently safe treatment. Major risks are as follows:

### **Risk of Impairment**

Medical Cannabis use 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 impairment depends on many factors but is more common when consuming Medical Cannabis with higher THC content. Drinking alcohol while using Medical Cannabis will worsen the impairment and is not recommended.

### **Risk of Dependence & Addiction**

Using Medical Cannabis can lead to dependence. The risk of developing a cannabis-use dependency is higher for patients who use products with higher THC content or have a history of substance abuse or addiction. Medical Cannabis should always be used with caution and under the watchful eye of your healthcare provider. While withdrawal symptoms are typically only found in heavy, regular users who stop cannabis use abruptly, the risk of withdrawal symptoms can vary by product content and dose.

### **Risk of Excessive Vomiting**

In rare cases, excessive and severe vomiting, daily nausea, and abdominal pain can occur. This can repeat in a 1-3 week cycle and is often referred to as Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome. If you experience these symptoms, stop your cannabis treatment and contact your healthcare provider.

### **Risk for Persons with Heart or Liver Disease**

Use Medical Cannabis with caution if you have heart or liver disease. Cannabis use increases heart rate and lowers blood pressure and may cause heart attacks in patients with known heart disease. Liver disease can affect the way that

the body processes cannabis, which can affect the safety and potency of Medical Cannabis treatment.

### **Risk for Persons Younger Than 22**

There is evidence that shows that cannabis use during the active period of brain development can lead to permanent brain damage. There's also an association with persons in this age group and development of mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia. The younger a person is when they start using cannabis, the more likely they are to disrupt and negatively affect this brain development period.

### **Risk for Persons Pregnant or Breastfeeding**

There is evidence that shows that cannabis use while pregnant can cause harm to the developing baby, such as low birth weight, premature birth, and/or brain damage. Breastfeeding mothers can transfer the chemicals in cannabis to their infants through their breast milk, which can cause harm to the child. Women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning a pregnancy should talk to their healthcare provider before using cannabis. Medical Cannabis Cards are not permitted for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

### **Risk of Mental Illness Development**

Cannabis use can be associated with severe periods of mental illness or psychotic episodes, recurring or otherwise. This risk appears to be higher when the patient is consuming products higher in THC levels and lower in CBD levels. There is evidence that cannabis can increase the risk of developing psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia — especially in people who have a family history of schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders. For this reason, it's not recommended for patients already at elevated risk for psychotic behavior, but if necessary, should be monitored by a healthcare provider closely and used with great caution.