

# It's Time to Talk About Cannabis:

## Understanding the health risks for using cannabis

Even though many states allow adults to legally use cannabis, that does not mean it is safe.

Cannabis has chemicals that change how your brain and body work. It can be addictive and may harm your health. People say cannabis affects their body and mind in different ways. This can include changes to your immune system, organs, blood flow, breathing, memory, and judgment. Some people do find relief from medical cannabis for a discreet number of conditions or side effects, and this should be discussed with your provider.

Read more to learn about the risks of cannabis use and how it impacts you.

### Important Terms to Know



#### Cannabis

Refers to all products derived from the cannabis sativa plant, which contains 500+ chemical substances. Also known as marijuana or weed.



#### THC

Refers to tetrahydrocannabinol, which is an addictive, psychoactive compound found in cannabis that results in a high.



#### CBD

Refers to cannabidiol, which is a compound found in cannabis that is not psychoactive and does not produce a high.



### Legal Does Not Mean Harmless

#### Always use medicinal cannabis products exactly as directed.

Never combine cannabis products with alcohol or other substances. It can lead to unpleasant or harmful side effects. You may vomit or feel nauseous and dizzy. Your reflexes and breathing slow down and your heart rate speeds up. Alcohol also increases the effects from cannabis, leading to intense sweating and feelings of paranoia, anxiety and panic.

Cannabis today can be many times stronger than decades ago, in some cases up to 95% THC in concentrated THC products.

It is not safe for young people to use any form of cannabis. It can cause significant short- and long-term risks. The likelihood of other drug use increases, and you may have problems with memory and concentration which can lead to difficulty at school. There's also a greater chance of developing mental health conditions.

Long-term use of cannabis by anyone can cause severe and lasting damage to health.

CBD is not currently regulated. Items that contain CBD are not FDA-approved, and CBD can have health risks and side effects.

### Many Types of Cannabis Products

Today, there are many forms of high-THC products that people can consume and use:

- ✓ Edibles
- ✓ Capsules
- ✓ Concentrates
- ✓ Flowers
- ✓ Oils
- ✓ Tinctures
- ✓ Topicals
- ✓ And more!



### Smoking and Vaping

There are many ways you can smoke or vape high-THC cannabis, including hash oil, wax, shatter, and more. This affects the lungs due to the inhaled smoke and is linked to many other health risks.

### Edibles

These can contain high levels of THC and are very potent, yet take longer to get into the bloodstream. This means it takes longer to feel the effects. You may accidentally ingest more than intended which can lead to acute intoxication and a high level of impairment.

## Cannabis and Health Risks

### Brain Health

- ✓ Studies suggest short-term cannabis use can cause problems with memory, thinking, and coordination.
- ✓ Any cannabis use by young people can impact brain development. Studies link it to cognitive impairment, lower academic performance, and other health risks.

### Fetal Health

- ✓ Do not use cannabis if you are pregnant. Risks include low birth weight, developmental delays, and learning disabilities for your baby.

### Cardiac Health

Research shows that:

- ✓ Daily users (medicinal or recreational) have a higher risk of heart failure.
- ✓ If you use cannabis and are hospitalized for any reason, you have a higher risk of a major heart- or brain-related event.

### Lung Health

Research shows that cannabis smoke:

- ✓ Damages lungs in similar ways to other kinds of smoking.
- ✓ Causes chronic bronchitis and damages the cell linings of large airways.
- ✓ Can lead to chronic cough, phlegm production, wheezing, and acute bronchitis.

### Young People

- ✓ Today's cannabis comes in many forms. None of them are safe for kids.
- ✓ If you use cannabis for any reason, you must keep it out of reach of kids and pets.
- ✓ If you allow minors to use your cannabis, you could be in legal trouble.



## Cannabis and Driving

Just like alcohol, you should NOT drive after using cannabis in any form.

Cannabis use can negatively impact:

- ✗ Balance, hand/eye coordination, and motor skills
- ✗ Your ability to make decisions
- ✗ How you see and understand things
- ✗ Your reaction time



## Cannabis and Mental Health

Research links cannabis use to:

- ⚠ Anxiety
- ⚠ Delirium
- ⚠ Psychosis
- ⚠ Suicide risk

## Have the Discussion

It's important to think about how cannabis use impacts your daily life. Ingesting cannabis in any way comes with serious risks to your health and lifestyle. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ❓ Do you plan your day around cannabis use?
- ❓ Is your social group made up of mostly cannabis users?
- ❓ Have you thought about cutting back on your cannabis use, but found it hard to do?
- ❓ Do you find yourself losing control when you use cannabis?
- ❓ Are you having trouble with work, school or family because of your cannabis use?



## Resources

### General Information



**Marijuana  
Anonymous**

[Marijuana Anonymous](#)



**Harvard Health  
Publishing**  
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

[Using Marijuana Safely](#)



[How to Tell If Your Child Is Vaping](#)



**National Institute on Drug Abuse**  
*Advancing Addiction Science*

[Cannabis DrugFacts](#)

A collaboration between **Lunder-Dineen Health Education Alliance of Maine** and  
**Mass General Brigham's Employee Assistance Program.**



**Mass General Brigham**  
Employee Assistance Program



**Massachusetts General Hospital**  
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