

MEDICAL CANNABIS 101

WHAT IS MEDICAL CANNABIS?

Cannabis is a species of plant that makes an abundance of compounds called cannabinoids. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is one of the most common cannabinoids; it can cause psychoactive effects. Products categorized as cannabis, or marijuana, contain more than 0.3% THC. Medical cannabis is used to treat pain, seizures, insomnia, nausea, low appetite, and other medical issues.





HOW IS MEDICAL CANNABIS ADMINISTERED?

- Smoking and vaporizing: Administered using rolled paper, a pipe, or a vaporizer.
- Oils: Ingested directly or through food or beverages; slower to activate, but provide longer pain relief. Should be measured carefully in cooking.
- Tinctures: Taken under the tongue or on the side of the cheek; provide faster pain relief, but don't last as long. Can be used more frequently.
- Topicals and patches: Salves or creams applied directly to the skin, or patches containing cannabis that are affixed to the skin.
- Sublingual sprays: Sprayed under the tongue.
- Edibles and pills: Ingested through food, gummies, or capsules.
- Dabbing: Heating concentrated cannabis and inhaling the vaporized oil.
- Ingesting fresh cannabis: Eating raw cannabis buds.



STRAINS OF CANNABIS

Sativa

These products tend to be more energizing; they are often used during the day.

Indica

These products tend to be more calming; they are often used in the evening.

Hybrid

These products are a mixture of indica and sativa; they describe many products available today.

IS MEDICAL CANNABIS LEGAL IN MY STATE?

Medical cannabis laws change frequently. To learn about access and legality in your state, visit one of the following resources:

- safeaccessnow.org/states
- norml.org/laws
- mpp.org/states

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

If medical cannabis is legal in your state and you want to explore if it could be helpful in treating your pain, consider discussing the following topics with your doctor. Keep in mind that some doctors are more versed in medical cannabis than others. Be sure to do your own research and bring resources and information with you to the appointment, including information about legality in your state. It is important to start with your doctor when discussing medical cannabis, but keep in mind that specific questions about strains and ways to administer medical cannabis may be better asked at a dispensary.

- The use of cannabis for your specific condition that causes you pain.
- Other medications you are taking, and if any of them may interact with cannabis.
- Medication changes that may be made after cannabis is incorporated, and any specific processes for weaning off other medications.
- Symptom relief or changing symptoms once you are using medical cannabis.



QUESTIONS TO ASK AT A DISPENSARY

It may take time to find the strain and potency that works best for you. Be patient, and keep a log to keep track of your results with each strain, dosage, and method of administering to find the best match.

- What form of cannabis and method of administering is the best fit for you and your condition.
- Which strains are better suited to daytime or nighttime use for your specific needs.
- How to best determine which strain to use and what potency is needed to treat your pain.

OBTAINING AND GROWING CANNABIS

- Some states allow individuals to cultivate, or grow, their own medical cannabis. This allows you full control over what strains you use and how they are grown, and allows you to know that your product is grown free from unwanted chemicals.
- In some states, medical cannabis patients can designate a person, called a caregiver, to grow medical cannabis on their behalf. The caregiver needs to be formally registered or designated, and all cannabis they grow is for the designated patient only.
- Dispensaries are licensed to sell medical cannabis in states that allow its use. They require patients to provide their medical cannabis ID card and other necessary documentation, and often can answer questions about different strains and methods.

Learn about medical cannabis, advocacy, and more by visiting:

uspainfoundation.org/medicalcannabis.org

This resource was created through support from PurWell, Herbie, and TribeTokes. The U.S. Pain Foundation independently developed the content without review from its sponsors. This information is educational only and should not be used as a substitute for advice from a health care professional. Please discuss medical cannabis use with your doctor and research the laws in your state.