

The good, the bad, and the unknown

It is important for cancer patients to have correct and unbiased information about cannabis (marijuana).

The Good

- Research tells us that cannabis may help some people with nausea caused by chemotherapy after other medicines did not work.
- Some patients with cancer report that cannabis helps with symptoms, including pain, anxiety, insomnia, poor appetite, and depression, though this has not been proven.
- Cannabis access in the state of Michigan has increased.
- Doctors are becoming better informed about cannabis.

The Bad

- Cannabis can cause side effects such as drowsiness, memory problems, hallucinations, dizziness, worsening of anxiety or depression, paranoia, and nausea/vomiting.
- About 10% of patients who use cannabis develop problematic cannabis use, known as Cannabis Use Disorder.
- We do not fully know how cannabis may impact other medications. It may make some medications used to fight cancer less effective.
- Research tells us that cannabis may cause worsening of quality of life.
- Research shows that, compared to non-users, daily cannabis users had 25% higher odds of heart attack and 42% higher odds of stroke.
- Research shows that those who inhale cannabis are more likely to have asthma and lung disease.
- Some people falsely suggest that cannabis has been shown to cure cancer. Cannabis is NOT a cure for cancer or a treatment for cancer. Patients with cancer should use treatments recommended by a cancer doctor.

The Unknown

Relatively little research has been done on cannabis in patients with cancer. We need to know a lot more about cannabis. There may be unknown risks of cannabis use.

If You Choose to Use Cannabis

- Tell your doctors that you are using cannabis.
- Follow cannabis laws, which vary from state to state.
- Do not inhale cannabis by smoking or other means (products made from cannabis can be consumed by eating, drinking, placing under the tongue, applying to the skin, or inserting into the rectum).
- Do not drive while using cannabis.
- Protect others from accidentally consuming cannabis.
- Start with a low dose of cannabis and increase the dose slowly until you either have unwanted side effects from the cannabis or the issue that you are trying to treat is improved.
- You will likely build a tolerance to cannabis with time. This means that you will need to increase your dose of cannabis to get the same effect.
- Use cannabis for symptoms of cancer or cancer treatments only after medicines backed by scientific evidence have failed.

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/marijuana-and-cancer.html

National Cancer Institute
<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/cam/patient/cannabis-pdq>

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
<https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine/herbs/cannabis>

The authors of this information sheet would like to note that we have not recommended that any form of cannabis be used to treat any medical condition. The purpose of this sheet is to provide information about cannabis and to encourage discussions between patients with cancer and their medical providers. People with cancer should not use cannabis unless they have first discussed it with their healthcare providers.

Updated 12.1.25

