



# Guide to Safer Cannabis Use

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This package was created by Healthy U: Peer Health & Wellness at the University of Manitoba. We are a group of trained, non-judgmental, and confidential student health and wellness leaders on campus.

We provide outreach activities, workshops, and one-on-one support for our fellow students on a variety of health and well-being topics. Feel free to drop in to chat or pick up more information packages.

If you would like to request or attend one of our workshops or events, check out our website for details.



# Your Health & Cannabis Use

Whether you use cannabis (also called weed or marijuana) regularly or only once in a while, there can be risks involved. What you do about your cannabis use and your safety is up to you, but research has provided some recommendations.

In the same way that it is important to keep an eye on your diet and how it affects your health, it is important to understand your cannabis use and how it may effect your body and your life. **Cannabis may effect your physical, mental, emotional, and social health. It is important to practice self-care, however this may look for you.**

Like other substances, there are short and long term effects of cannabis use. The impact can look different for everyone and it can vary from one use to the next.

Potential short-term effects:

- Impair your ability to drive safely
- Impact learning and memory
- Affect your mental health



Potential long-term risk:

Using cannabis frequently (daily) and over a long time (months or years) can have an impact on your health.

- Hurt your lungs and make it difficult to breath if smoked
- Negatively impact your mental health

## THC vs CBD

Cannabis contains hundreds of chemical substances. Over 100 of these are cannabinoids. Cannabinoids impact the body and brain by changing how receptors communicate and behave with each other.

**THC:** Cannabinoid delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is responsible for how your body and brain behave to cannabis. There are positive and negative impacts of THC. As the concentration of THC increases, so do the harmful effects.

**CBD:** Cannabidiol (CBD) is another cannabinoid. CBD does not create intoxication or a high (unlike THC). There is some evidence that CBD may lower the negative effects of THC. It is recommended to use cannabis products with a higher CBD than THC concentration.

Adapted from Cannabis and your health: Government of Canada

# Potential Risks

Everyone responds differently to cannabis and has their own risk factors for harm (such as pre-existing mental illness, family members with addictions, poor coping skills, lung conditions, and many more). But while it's tough to say what might happen to you specifically, here are some of the more **common problems associated with cannabis use**:

- **Mental health problems** (anxiety, psychosis, depression, suicide): You are at a higher risk if one of your immediate family members has a mental illness, and using cannabis can worsen any mental illnesses you already have. For example, if you already experience anxiety cannabis can make it worse (despite being typically described as relaxing).
- **Social problems**: If cannabis is a common activity for you and your friends, you may begin to have trouble socializing when you don't want to use. Your cannabis use may also cause tension with family or friends who don't use or who disagree with your choices.
- **Physical problems**: Cannabis can affect your appetite, therefore affecting the choices you make about your nutrition. Cannabis can also affect your memory, attention span, and ability to make decisions. Smoking cannabis can damage your lungs and either cause or worsen lung infections, asthma, or emphysema.
- **Addiction**: Although many people say you can't become addicted to cannabis, this is a myth. In fact, about 1 in 5 Canadians who received treatment for substance use had cannabis-related problems.

Adapted from Health Effects of Cannabis: Government of Canada



# Recommendations

According to Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines

## Abstinence

Like anything else that can be harmful, the best way to keep yourself safe is to not use the substance at all. When thinking about using cannabis, consider the risks and the benefits.

## Defer Use

Harms from cannabis use have been linked to starting at an early age, which may be related to brain development. Since your brain isn't fully developed until your mid-twenties, consider waiting until then to try cannabis. Ensure that you are in a safe environment with people you trust for your first time

## Use Cannabis with Lower THC

Cannabis is made up of a few different components, including THC and CBD. THC is the part that can cause hallucinations and is responsible for most of the harms of cannabis use. CBD counter-acts some of the THC, meaning it can make your cannabis more safe. If possible, try using cannabis products with less THC and more CBD - this is often referred to as a high CBD:THC ratio.

## Avoid Synthetic Cannabinoids

Health risks are much higher in synthetic cannabis products, such as K2 or Spice. If you want to lower your risk, avoid these products.

## Avoid Smoking

You have probably heard that inhaling smoke is bad for your lungs - this applies to smoking cannabis too. Try non-inhaled methods such as edibles or vaporizers. Just remember that edibles often contain higher doses of cannabis, so be aware of how much you're using.



## Avoid Deep Inhalation

If you're going to be inhaling your cannabis (i.e. smoking a joint), avoid deep inhalation or holding your breath before exhaling, as these expose your lungs to more smoke. Try inhaling less smoke with each puff, and exhaling sooner than you would have before.

## Use Less Often

The risks associated with cannabis use are linked to how often you use it. If you use cannabis daily or almost every day, you are at a much higher risk for problems (either right away or later on) than if you use it once a week or only on weekends.

## Don't Use and Drive

Cannabis can make it harder to concentrate, make judgement calls, and have control over your physical actions. This means that driving while using can be very dangerous. While everyone responds to cannabis differently, you typically need to wait 6 hours after using before it is safe to drive.

## Know Your Other Risks

If you have a first-degree relative (i.e. a parent or sibling) with an addiction or who experiences psychosis, you have a much higher risk of developing the same. If you are pregnant, cannabis can harm the fetus as well. Know what makes you a higher risk for troubles than others, and weigh this in to your decision about whether or not to use.

## Avoid Combining Risks

While each of the risks described here can cause issues on their own, it is even more dangerous to combine these risks (i.e. using high-THC cannabis every day). Try eliminating as many risk factors as you can in order to keep yourself as safe as possible.

Adapted from Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse & Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)



# Where to get help

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If you are concerned about your cannabis use for any reason, seek help! There are many resources available for a variety of issues.

## **Healthy U: 474 UMSU University Centre\***

Learn about your cannabis use from a peer health educator or online.

Website: <https://www.healthyuofm.com/>

## **Student Counselling Centre: 474 UMSU University Centre\***

If you are looking for someone to talk to regarding the effects of cannabis use on your mental, emotional, or social health, consider visiting the Student Counselling Centre on campus.

Website: <http://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/counselling-resources-students>

## **University Health Services: 104 UMSU University Centre\***

If you have concerns about the effects of cannabis on your physical health, visit University Health Services on campus, or see your family doctor.

Website: <http://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/health-wellness/university-health-service>

## **Health and Wellness Office: 474 UMSU University Centre\***

Connect with the Health and Wellness Educator to talk about substance use and the impact it has on your overall well-being.

Website: <https://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/health-wellness>

## **Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM): 1031 Portage Avenue, or on campus\***

If you are seeking help for an addiction, consider meeting with an AFM counsellor at the Student Counselling Centre. You can also visit AFM's website at [afm.mb.ca](http://afm.mb.ca) for a list of services and contact numbers.

\*There are no in-person services at the University of Manitoba currently. Check the relevant websites for remote services and updates.