

Cannabis Harm Reduction



Tailoring & Communicating Cannabis Harm Reduction Pathways

New or Occasional Use:

- **Start Low, Go Slow:** Start with 1 or 2 puffs and wait 15 minutes. Then, they may increase by 1 inhalation every 15–30 min until desired symptom control has been achieved.
- **Choose Low THC Products:** Opt for products with 10% (100mg/g) THC or less or products with more or equal amount of CBD to counteract the effects of THC.
- **Shallow Puffs and Avoid Holding your Breath:** To minimize lung exposure to tar and chemicals. Most THC is absorbed in the first few seconds, so avoid holding your breath.
- **Avoid Mixing:**
 - With Tobacco:** Increases exposure to harmful toxins and tar.
 - With Alcohol:** Effects are intensified and may last longer.

Regular or Daily Use:

Many of the same principles for new or occasional users apply here as well – refer to the above for tips on low dosing, product selection, and inhalation techniques. Additional considerations for regular users are;

- **Try sublingual oils or edibles to be gentler on the lungs.**
 - Sublingual oil administration has a faster onset of action (approximately 15–45 minutes) and lasts similarly to the oral forms (6–8 hours).
 - Following edibles (begin with 2.5 mg of THC or less), effects set in with a delay of 30 minutes to 2 hours, reach their maximum after 2–4 hours and last for about 12-24 hours, depending on dose.
- **Reduce Doses:** Take regular breaks and avoid daily use to prevent tolerance buildup and reduce health risks.
- **Understand Duration:** Effects can last up to 6-24 hours depending on the dosage.

Vaping Cannabis:

- **Vapour contains ingredients that can harm the lungs.**
- **Higher THC Concentrations:** Leads to faster and more intense effects.
- **Explosion Risk:** Potential for vape devices to malfunction.
- **The “positive” perception of reduced respiratory system harm linked to vaping could lead to more frequent consumption or earlier initiation of cannabis, and a concomitant increased risk of developing problematic use.**

Using Bonges / Pipes:



- **Bonges:**
 - Don't Filter THC Effectively:** Water absorbs some THC, but less tar.
 - Use glass material.**
 - Avoid certain Materials:** Don't use plastic bottles, rubber hoses, or aluminum cones to avoid toxic fumes.
- **Pipes:**
 - Use glass, stainless steel, or brass pipes for safety.**
 - Avoid Wood and Plastic:** These materials can release toxic fumes.

Consuming Edibles:

- **Start Low, Go Slow:**
 - Start with a low dose** (2.5 mg THC or less) and wait at least 1 hour before taking more.
 - Wait for Full Effects:** Edibles can take longer to kick in, so patience is key.
- **Portion Size Awareness:**
 - Many edible products (e.g., brownies) have much higher THC content than expected.
 - A small nibble* is recommended to assess how it affects you.

**Advise patients to be very cautious when consuming edible products. For example, if they're eating an edible brownie, remind them that it's not the same as a regular brownie—the cannabis content can be much higher than 2.5mg per serving of a typical brownie. Many patients may not fully understand how potent a typical portion can be. Consuming too much can lead to intense effects that last longer than expected, potentially causing discomfort and making the patient avoid edibles in the future in favor of smoking cannabis. Start with a very small nibble to gauge its effect and give at least one hour to feel the full effects before consuming more.*

- **Avoid Alcohol:** When combined with cannabis, alcohol can intensify effects and prolong them.
- **Duration:** Effects can last from 6-24 hours depending on how much cannabis was consumed.

Applying Topicals (Lotions, Creams, Balms):

- **Topical cannabis is used by individuals to manage various conditions** such as eczema, psoriasis, acne, joint pain, and migraines, despite limited clinical endorsement—Health Canada does not officially recommend its use in dermatology due to insufficient evidence.
- **Common side effects include** skin reactions like redness, irritation, itching, blistering, and changes in skin or hair color. Around 30% of users in a 2021 survey reported experiencing local adverse effects.
- **Evidence on its effectiveness is mixed**—while some preclinical studies suggest benefits for inflammatory skin conditions, others report that it may worsen these conditions or trigger allergic reactions such as hives or contact dermatitis.
- **If using, Start Slow:** Begin with a small amount in area of concern and wait at least 1 hour to assess effects before using more.

Key Reminders:

Avoid Daily Use: Consider breaks to minimize long-term risks.

Understand Dosage: Start small and monitor how your body responds, especially with new methods like edibles.

Avoid Mixing: Keep cannabis separate from tobacco and alcohol for safer effects.