


Best practices for safe use of medical cannabis

May 2025

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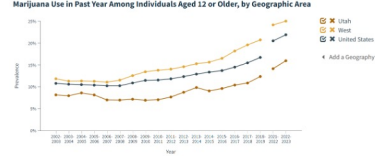
1

Presentation overview

1. Cannabis use continues to grow
2. Key factors to consider during a medical cannabis assessment
3. Endocannabinoid system
4. Strategies for safer use
5. Products and dosing
6. Questions

2

Cannabis use continues to grow




NOTE: Estimates from 2011-2022 are not comparable to estimates from previous years due to changes in NSDUH survey methodology.

Cannabis is the most commonly used federally illegal drug in the United States; 22% of Americans, used it at least once in 2023.

3

Key factors to consider during a medical cannabis assessment



4

Does the patient have one of the following qualifying conditions?

- Acute pain that lasts 2 weeks or longer for an acute condition
- ALS
- Alzheimer's
- Autism
- Cachexia
- Cancer
- Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis
- Epilepsy or debilitating seizures
- HIV
- Hospice care
- MS or persistent and debilitating muscle spasms
- Persistent nausea
- Persistent pain
- PTSD
- Rare conditions
- Terminal illness
- Other - patients under 21 years old or without a qualifying condition need to submit a petition the Compassionate Use Board

5

Do the risks outweigh the benefits?

Use these questions to assess if medical cannabis is a good fit for the patient.

- Have you checked other medical conditions, like pregnancy, heart conditions, and mental health conditions?
- Have you checked other medications they're taking?
- Have you checked if they'll need help receiving care?
- Have you assessed their age?
- Do they have a history of using cannabis or other substances?
- Have you talked about the expected effects, potential side effects, and how to use cannabis safely?

6

Are there plans for monitoring and evaluation?

Discuss ongoing care with the patient to improve outcomes from medical cannabis treatment.

- Have you talked to them about tracking the effects of cannabis and telling you if they have concerns or issues?
- Have you talked to them about which products and doses to use? If not, have you told them the pharmacist will help them with this?
- Have you set treatment goals while using cannabis?
- Have you created a safe space for your patient to talk to you about their treatment, goals, questions, and concerns?
- Do you have a plan for follow-up?

7

7

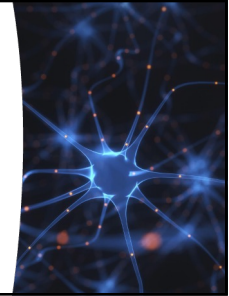
Why is education on safe medical cannabis use important?

- Educating patients on how to use cannabis safely can lead to better treatment outcomes and empower patients.
- Medical cannabis is different than other prescribed medicine because it can affect people differently. The same strain and dosage may cause relief for one patient and may not work for another.

8

8

Endocannabinoid system



9

Endocannabinoid system

- History of the discovery of THC, CBD and the endocannabinoid system.
- What is the endocannabinoid system and what is its purpose?
- How does supplementing the endocannabinoid system help patients with pain or other symptoms?
- Seek additional training and resources.

10

10

Strategies for safer use



11

11

What can be done to promote safe practices?

- Medical cannabis should not be the first line of treatment.
- Carefully screen patients before recommending medical cannabis to them.
- During an assessment, discuss treatment goals, address any concerns, and plan for ongoing care.
- **The next few slides will focus on topics providers can discuss with their patients to assess if they'd be a good fit for medical cannabis.**

12

12

Some mental health conditions may not respond well to cannabis treatment

- Bipolar disorder
 - Greater severity
 - More time in manic/mixed episodes
 - More psychotic symptoms
 - Increased symptoms of mania
- Depression
 - Higher levels of depressive symptoms in cannabis users

[Munich 2017](#)
[Munich 2017](#)
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13

Some mental health conditions may not respond well to cannabis treatment

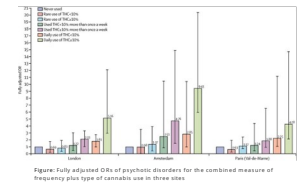
- PTSD
 - Mixed results on effect of cannabis on PTSD symptoms.
 - PTSD is a qualifying condition for medical cannabis in Utah. Patients with PTSD should be thoroughly evaluated to see if the benefits of medical cannabis treatment outweigh the risks.
- Anxiety
 - THC appears to decrease anxiety at lower doses and increase anxiety at higher doses.

[Munich 2017](#)
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14

Family or personal history of psychosis can increase the risks associated with cannabis

- The amount of cannabis, THC potency, and how often it's used all impact the risk for psychosis associated with cannabis use.
- Using cannabis in adolescence can increase this risk of developing schizophrenia spectrum disorder.
- Do not recommend cannabis until patients are ~25 years or older, unless the benefits outweigh the risks.



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15

Contraindications

- Pregnant
- Lactation
- Cardiac conditions (unstable)
 - Ischemic heart disease, arrhythmia, CHF, uncontrolled HTN
- History of allergic reaction to cannabinoids
- Psychiatric diagnoses – schizophrenia spectrum
- Immunocompromised or on immunosuppressives

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16

Drug-drug interactions

- Cannabinoids can be administered safely with most drugs.
- May affect the cytochrome P450 enzyme system.
 - but no significant interactions have been reported with Marinol or Sativex.
- May lower blood pressure.
- THC can escalate heart rate for several minutes after inhalation.
- Can increase sedation when mixed with alcohol, benzos, antihistamines, sleep aids and opiates.
- Can increase the cardiac effects of amphetamines, antidepressants, beta blockers and diuretics.
- Can increase the INR values with warfarin and maybe other anticoagulants.

17

Know how much THC is in a product and learn how to read labels

- Different health conditions benefit from different amounts of THC.
- Knowing the THC:CBD ratio may help in deciding what products work best for your patient.
- High THC corresponds with increased risk of intoxication symptoms, psychosis, cannabis use disorder, cardiovascular events, and more.

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18

Understand the risks of regular use

- Cannabis use disorder may develop in up to 10% of adults using cannabis and up to 16% of children and adolescents using cannabis.
- The younger a person is when they start to use cannabis, the more likely they are to have a problem with cannabis dependence and abuse.
- Regular cannabis use increases risk of medical concerns:
 - Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome
 - Pulmonary-chronic bronchitis
 - Cardiovascular events such as heart attacks

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19


Wait about 6-8 hours after using cannabis before driving or operating heavy machinery

- Driving under the influence is illegal—this includes cannabis.
- Cannabis slows reaction time, impairs judgement, and decreases coordination.
- Patients can call a friend, taxi, take public transit, or use a rideshare app if they need to go somewhere after using medical cannabis.

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20

Products and dosing




- Extremely individualized
- Method of delivery
- Ratio of cannabinoids
- Start low and go slow

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21

Assess dosage forms and discuss options with patient


- Not all medical cannabis products will have the desired outcomes for everyone.
- Know the risks associated with different routes of administration and take those into consideration.
 - Inhalation (vaping and smoking): EVALI (e-cigarette vaping product associated lung injury), increased risk of lung disease such as bronchitis
 - Oral (gummies and tinctures): takes longer to feel the effects



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22

Whole flower preparation




Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower cost • Widely available • Contains all cannabinoids and terpenes
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannabinoid content may not be high enough • Carcinogens and plant materials may be inhaled • Improper storage → mold and plant degradation

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23

Inhalation/vaporization




Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate onset • Easy titration and adjustment • No harmful byproducts • Clean
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oils can clog machines • Machines may be expensive and require maintenance • Proper use required

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24


Edibles



Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long duration & stronger effects • Dosing easier and more precise • No harmful byproducts
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onset is delayed • Risk of over-consumption • Risk of accidental consumption • Potential allergies

25


Tinctures/oral mucosal



Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to use and titrate • More ratios of CBD:THC available • Minor cannabinoids and terpenes can be added • Can add to food or beverages • Long shelf life & flexibility • Discrete and portable
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistencies in formulations and labeling

26

Topicals



Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids first-pass metabolism • Localized pain management • Reduces inflammation and arthritis • Non-psychoactive even with THC
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible irritation • Low skin penetration • Potential allergy

27

Side effects

- Side effects - usually from too much THC
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Euphoria
- Impairment of mental status
- Tachycardia
- Drop in blood pressure
- Dizziness
- Side effects are usually mild or moderate and usually resolve quickly

28

Resources

For more information, visit <https://medicalcannabis.utah.gov/>

- *Medical cannabis patient assessment checklist* webpage under the *Providers* tab
- *Important information about medical cannabis* under the *Patients* tab

29

Questions?

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30