

Cannabis and Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)

Cannabis and Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)

What is cannabis?

Cannabis is a dried flower bud. It can also be called weed or pot. When smoked or eaten, cannabis can be a depressant and a hallucinogen (cause you to see or hear things that are not real).

Cannabis is now legal in Canada. This has made it easier to buy and use cannabis. It is important that people with CKD know the risks and benefits of using cannabis.

Cannabis is made up of many chemical parts called cannabinoids. The 2 main cannabinoids are:

- › Cannabidiol (CBD)
- › Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)

Is cannabis safe with CKD?

After using cannabis, your liver removes most of the cannabis from your body. Your body **does not** depend on your kidneys to remove cannabis. This means that how much cannabis you take **does not** need to be adjusted based on your kidney function.

Cannabis is also lipophilic. This means it stays in the body's fat cells before being slowly released. If you accidentally consume too much, you may have effects of cannabis for up to 1 week (7 days) after you last used it.

Cannabis does not affect your kidney function, but it may affect other parts of your body. For example:

- Cannabis causes you to be impaired (not able to function as usual)
 - › If you are a home dialysis patient, cannabis can affect your ability to manage your dialysis treatments.
 - › If you visit an in-person dialysis treatment centre, you **cannot** drive to get treatment under the influence of cannabis. How long you should wait before driving after using cannabis depends on how you consumed (ate or smoked) cannabis and how it affects you.

- › You may experience withdrawal syndrome, which can cause irritability, trouble sleeping, and/or anxiety or panic.
- **You should not use cannabis:**
 - › **if you are under 25 years of age.** Cannabis may raise your risk for long-term psychiatric side effects and may affect your developing brain.
 - › **if you have a psychiatric illness** (like bipolar disorder or anxiety) **or a history of psychosis** (a condition which affects the mind). Cannabis may make these conditions worse.
 - › **if you have asthma or COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder).** Smoking cannabis can irritate (bother) your lungs.
 - › **if you have heart problems.** Cannabis can affect your blood pressure.
 - › **if you are pregnant or breastfeeding/chestfeeding.** The effects of cannabis are still not known.

Can cannabis treat CKD?

- There is not enough information about cannabis use in CKD. More research is needed to know if and how cannabis works to treat certain conditions.

- Some research has looked at how cannabis may help symptoms of certain conditions.
 - › For example: if cannabis can lower nerve pain, nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), and vomiting (throwing up) from chemotherapy treatment.
- Most health care providers do not recommend cannabis until all other treatments and medications have failed. This is because:
 - › there is a high risk of side effects.
 - › we do not know enough about how it works and how effective it is.

Are there drug interactions?

Do not use cannabis with alcohol, opioids (pain medication), or other drugs which may make you feel sleepy or confused. There is a higher risk of impairment (not being able to function as usual) when you use these substances at the same time.

Cannabis may interact with other medications. Talk to your health care team before using cannabis to see if there are any interactions with your current medications.

What does my health care team recommend?

More research needs to be done in people with CKD to know the benefits and harms of cannabis. At this time, people with CKD should be careful when using cannabis.

If you are using cannabis:

- › **“Start low and go slow”**. This means to eat or smoke only a small amount at first.
- › To lower the effects of smoke and vape inhalation, it is safer to eat cannabis products rather than smoking or vaping them.
- › Avoid cannabis products that are high in THC. Consuming products with high THC is more likely to cause psychiatric complications.

Please tell a member of your health care team if you are using cannabis.

What should I check for while using cannabis?

Watch closely for any side effects while using cannabis, including:

- Tiredness
- Feeling 'high'
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Feeling anxious
- Vision (seeing) problems
- Trouble speaking
- Hallucinations

What are your questions?

Please ask. We are here to help you.

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Renal Program
Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services

WQ85-2441 © October 2024 Nova Scotia Health Authority
To be reviewed October 2027 or sooner, if needed.

