

Patient information leaflet: Medicinal Cannabis.

1. What is Medical Cannabis?

Medical Cannabis is extracted from the natural cannabis plant. The medical cannabis is extracted from the female cannabis plant. Medical Cannabis contains various active ingredients, including Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD) as the main ingredients. The composition of these components will determine the effect and side effects of the cannabis.

The Medical Cannabis that is prescribed by the Doctor, will meet quality requirements. This cannabis is intended for therapeutic purposes, which is why it is known as medicinal cannabis.

Following a review in 2018 by Chief Medical Officer Dame Sally Davies, Medical Cannabis was rescheduled from schedule 1 drug meaning this had no therapeutic value and so one cannot prescribe, or store was changed to schedule 2 with evidence of benefit. This means it can now be prescribed under specialist supervision as a medicinal product.

What is it used for?

In recent years, scientific studies have been conducted with the use of medicinal cannabis to treat many different health conditions. The evidence is not robust but shows some promise. The results of these studies are varied. There is some evidence that cannabis can be effective for conditions like epilepsy, chronic pain, nerve related pain, nausea vomiting. Anxiety, PTSD, IBS etc. it benefits only a proportion of people, not all.

When can it be prescribed?

Medical cannabis should not be a first line treatment, it may not cure your condition or disorder, but it helps in relieving the intensity of symptoms. Medicinal cannabis can also help reduce the required dosage and side effects of other medicines like opioids. Medicinal cannabis is mainly prescribed if the usual treatments and medicines are not effective or causing unbearable side effects. After fulfilling the criteria as set by MHRA we will also look at other conventional and usual treatments which may be beneficial to you. For example, If you have not been offered treatments like Hypnotherapy for Irritable bowel syndrome or Botox for severe hypersensitivity or lignocaine infusion for fibromyalgia where applicable. These treatments will be offered first before medicinal cannabis.

Who can prescribe Medicinal Cannabis?

Most Medical Cannabis products are unlicensed medicines in the UK, however there are a small number of products with a marketing authorisation, which are licensed for certain conditions such as rare forms of epilepsy, **Unlicensed** Medical Cannabis products can **only** be prescribed by a specialist doctor on the General Medical Council's Specialist Register.

When should you not use Medical Cannabis, and when should you take extra care using it?

People with a genetic predisposition to psychoses (such as schizophrenia) or other psychological symptoms. In rare cases, cannabis can cause a psychotic episode in this group of patients.

People with heart or circulatory disease

Cannabis can have an effect on blood pressure and heart rate. **Increased Heart Rate, Heart rhythm problems, risk of Heart attack, stroke**

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Young people up to 23 years old.

This group is particularly sensitive to the substances in cannabis. The use of medicinal cannabis is therefore not recommended.

Elderly

Elderly may be more sensitive to the effects of cannabis

Pregnant and/or breastfeeding women

Use during pregnancy and/or breastfeeding is not recommended. Regular or prolonged use of cannabis during pregnancy can affect the development of the unborn child. Components of cannabis can also find their way into breast milk.

Driving/use of machine

The advice is not to drive or use machines which can put you or someone else in danger when you are using medicinal cannabis. Further Guidance www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law

Medical Cannabis and Alcohol

It is not recommended that you consume alcohol whilst taking Medical Cannabis. Medical Cannabis has an additive effect with Alcohol.

Interaction with food

The medicinal cannabinoid should be taken about the same time either with or without food as food may affect absorption and blood levels of the medication. Grapefruit and grapefruit juice may increase the blood levels of cannabidiol so their consumption should be limited.

How do you use Medical Cannabis?

Medical Cannabis is generally started at a very low dose and increase slowly over a number of weeks until individual symptoms are controlled, or you develop undesirable side effects. It may take up to 12 weeks to reach your individual required dose. It will not give you immediate results you need to build it up in your system over 3 to 4 weeks before you will start to feel the full benefits it may provide. If you increase your dose too quickly, you are more likely to experience side effects.

Have you forgotten a dose?

If you have missed a dose, you can take it as soon as you realise this. However, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a forgotten dose. Are you unsure about the correct usage? Please contact your doctor or pharmacist.

Can my Medicinal product be stopped, or further prescription withheld?

Yes, there are circumstances when the medicinal cannabis products can be stopped, and further prescription withheld. Some examples could be non-compliance of medication, sharing the product with others, product not effective for symptoms anymore, side effects.

Drug Interactions

This medication can affect with various drug like warfarin, psychotropic agents. Please discuss this with your doctor or health care professional.

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Adverse/ side effects

Patients generally tolerate medicinal cannabis well. Low doses are usually sufficient and side effects are therefore relatively rare. Side effects occur mainly with higher doses or with the simultaneous use of a substance that enhances the side effects (such as alcohol). Most of the available information regarding the acute and long-term effects of cannabis use comes from studies conducted on non-medical users, with much less information available from clinical studies of patients using cannabis for medical purposes. Many of the effects are biphasic, with increased activity with acute or smaller doses, and decreased activity with larger doses or chronic use

The main risks of THC cannabis products are:

- **Psychosis** – there is evidence that regular cannabis use increases your risk of developing a psychotic illness such as schizophrenia
- **Dependency on the medicine** – although scientists believe this risk is probably small when its use is controlled and monitored by a specialist doctor

After taking medical cannabis, it's possible to develop any of the following side effects:

- Decreased appetite/ increased appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Feeling sick
- Abdominal pain
- Greater weakness, Ataxia, incoordination and falls
- A behavioural or mood change
- Heightened feelings of fear and depression, suicidal ideation especially in men.
- Slower reaction times, especially during the first hours after use.
- Can affect ability to concentrate and can cause cloudiness of thoughts.
- Dizziness, fainting
- Feeling very tired
- Feeling high
- Hallucinations
- Suicidal thoughts
- Risk of acute pancreatitis
- Risk of liver fibrosis, CBD can also affect how your liver works
- Have effects on the reproductive system, reduced sperm count, concentration and motility. Dose dependent sexual behaviour in men.
- Cannabis and menstrual cycle disruptions. Higher risk of decreased fertility.
- There is a limited and conflicting evidence regarding carcinogenic potential with the use of cannabis. However, there is an association of cannabis use and testicular cancer and some other cancers if you smoke.

If you experience any side effects from medical cannabis, report these to your medical team. You can also report them through the [Yellow Card Scheme](#). CBD and THC can affect how other medicines work. Always discuss possible interactions with a specialist.

Dependency/ addiction

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Dependency does not generally occur with use at low doses, such as medicinal use. If you have been dependent in the past, you need to take extra care. There is a small risk of developing Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD), there is a small risk you can become both physically and mentally dependent on cannabis. There could be a small possibility of you getting addicted to other addiction including but not limited to cigarette or alcohol. You can also experience withdrawal syndrome. Discontinuing the doses can lead to withdrawal symptoms such as restlessness, irritability, insomnia and nausea.

Travel Advisory

You will need to seek advice before travelling abroad about the legality of cannabis-based medicinal products in other countries (see the [UK Government's advice on travelling with medicine containing a controlled drug](#)).

Please note

- Keep it safe and out of the reach of children store away from direct sunlight at an ambient temperature.
- Do Not allow others to use the prescribed medicine.
- Before you make a decision to go for this form of treatment, please look into the initial and recurring costs associated with the prescription.

References

1. www.nhs.uk/conditions/medical-cannabis/
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4. [information-health-care-professionals-cannabis-cannabinoids-eng.pdf](#)
5. [Cannabis_Guidance_unlicensed_CBPMs_updated_2020.pdf](#)
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7. www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law

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