

Recommendations

- Cannabis use has health risks best avoided by abstaining
- Delay taking up cannabis use until later in life
- Identify and choose lower-risk cannabis products
- Don't use synthetic cannabinoids
- Avoid smoking burnt cannabis—choose safer ways of using
- If you smoke cannabis, avoid harmful smoking practices
- Limit and reduce how often you use cannabis
- Don't use and drive, or operate other machinery
- Avoid cannabis use altogether if you are at risk for mental health problems or are pregnant
- Avoid combining these risks

Reference

Fischer, B., Russell, C., Sabioni, P., van den Brink, W., Le Foll, B., Hall, W., Rehm, J. & Room, R. (2017). Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (LRCUG): An evidence-based update. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(8). DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2017.303818.

Endorsements

The LRCUG have been endorsed by the following organizations:



Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

Evidence. Engagement. Impact.

Centre canadien sur
les dépendances et
l'usage de substances

Données. Engagement. Résultats.

Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health (in principle)



Cannabis use is a personal choice,
but it comes with risks to your
health and well-being. Follow
these recommendations to reduce
your risks.

Acknowledgment

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A longer evidence summary of the guidelines, aimed at health professionals, is available at camh.ca.

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Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale

Health risks of cannabis use

There is strong scientific evidence that cannabis use is associated with a variety of health risks. The risks depend on your constitution, which kinds of cannabis products you use and how or how often you use them. Some of the main health risks are:

- problems with thinking, memory or physical co-ordination
- impaired perceptions or hallucinations
- fatal and non-fatal injuries, including those from motor-vehicle accidents, due to impairment
- mental health problems and cannabis dependence
- chronic respiratory or lung problems
- reproductive problems.

Reducing health risks related to cannabis use

When choosing to use cannabis, you can actively take steps to reduce risks to your health. Below are 10 science-based recommendations for how to do so. These recommendations are aimed mainly at non-medical cannabis use.

Cannabis use has health risks best avoided by abstaining

To avoid all risks, do not use cannabis. If you decide to use, you could experience immediate, as well as long-term risks to your health and well-being. Any time you choose not to use, you avoid these risks.

Delay taking up cannabis use until later in life

Using cannabis at a young age, particularly before age 16, increases the likelihood of developing health, educational and social problems. Avoid cannabis use during adolescence. Generally, the later in life you begin to use cannabis, the lower the risk of problems.

Identify and choose lower-risk cannabis products

High-potency cannabis products, with high tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content, are more likely to result in harms. Some products contain a higher dose of cannabidiol (CBD), which counteracts some of THC's adverse effects. This means that products with high CBD-to-THC ratios reduce some of the risks. Know what you're using. Ideally, choose cannabis products with lower risk of harms.

Don't use synthetic cannabinoids

Compared with natural cannabis products, synthetic cannabis products (e.g., K2 or Spice) can lead to more severe health problems, even death. If you use, give preference to natural cannabis products and abstain from synthetics.

Avoid smoking burnt cannabis—choose safer ways of using

Smoking burnt cannabis, especially when combined with tobacco, can harm your lungs and respiratory system. Choose other methods, such as vaporizers or edibles instead—but recognize that they also come with some risks. For example, edibles are safer for your lungs, but you may consume larger doses and experience more severe impairment because psychoactive effects are delayed.

If you smoke cannabis, avoid harmful smoking practices

If you smoke cannabis, avoid “deep inhalation” or “breath-holding.” These practices are meant to increase psychoactive experiences, but they increase the amount of toxic material absorbed by your lungs and into your body.

Limit and reduce how often you use cannabis

Frequent cannabis use (i.e., daily or almost every day) is strongly linked to a higher risk of health and social problems. Limit yourself—and ideally your friends or others you may be using with—to occasional use, such as on weekends or one day a week at most.

Don't use and drive, or operate other machinery

Driving while impaired by cannabis substantially increases your risk of being involved in a motor-vehicle accident resulting in injury or death. Don't use and drive, or use other machinery. Wait at least six hours after using cannabis—or even longer if you need. Combining cannabis and alcohol further increases impairment, so be sure to avoid this combination if you plan to drive.

Avoid cannabis use altogether if you are at risk for mental health problems or are pregnant

Some individuals should not use cannabis because of specific risk profiles. If you or an immediate family member has a history of psychosis or substance use disorder, your risk of cannabis-related mental health problems increases, and you should abstain from use. Pregnant women should not use cannabis because it could harm the fetus or newborn.

Avoid combining the risks identified above

The more of these risky behaviours you engage in when using cannabis, the higher your risk of harms. For example, initiating cannabis use at a young age and smoking high-potency products every day puts you at much higher risk of both immediate and long-term problems. Avoid combining these high-risk choices.

