

## What is medical cannabis?

"**Medical cannabis**" is a broad term for any sort of cannabis-based medicine used to relieve symptoms.

Many cannabis-based products are available to buy online, but their quality and content is not known. They may be illegal and potentially dangerous.

Some products such as "CBD oil" or hemp oil are available to buy legally as food supplements from health stores. These are not considered to be medical products.) There is no guarantee these are of good quality or provide any health benefits. Some cannabis-based products are available on prescription as medicinal cannabis. These are only likely to benefit a very small number of patients.

## Further information

The NHS website page Cannabis the Facts has further information on cannabis use.

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/cannabis-the-facts/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/cannabis-the-facts/)

Risks of regularly smoking cannabis:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/cannabis-the-facts/#cannabis-and-mental-health>

Yellow Card Scheme:

<https://www.yccscotland.scot.nhs.uk/reporting/Pages/default.aspx>

Information in this leaflet is adapted from NHS England website

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/medical-cannabis/#](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/medical-cannabis/#)  
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# Medical Cannabis

An  
information  
leaflet for  
patients

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### Can I get a prescription for medical cannabis?

Very few people are likely to get a prescription for medical cannabis. Currently, prescribing may be considered for the following conditions:

- children and adults with rare, severe forms of epilepsy
- adults with vomiting or nausea caused by chemotherapy

It would only be considered when other treatments weren't suitable or hadn't helped. This decision would be made by your hospital consultant.

There is some evidence medical cannabis can help certain types of pain, though this evidence is not yet strong enough to recommend it for pain relief.

### What about products available to buy?

Some cannabis-based products are available to buy online without a prescription.

It's likely most of these products – even those called "CBD oils" – will be illegal to possess or supply. There's a good chance they will contain THC (the chemical that gets you high), and may not be safe to use.

Health stores sell certain types of "pure CBD". However, there is no guarantee these products will be of good quality.

(CBD = cannabidiol, THC =tetrahydrocannabinol)

### Is medical cannabis safe?

The risks of using cannabis products containing THC (the chemical that gets you high) are not currently clear. That's why clinical trials are needed before they can be used. So called "pure" products that

only contain CBD, do not carry these unknown risks linked with THC. However, in reality, it is likely that most products will contain a certain amount of THC. 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

Generally, the more THC the product contains, the greater these risks are. Cannabis bought illegally off the street, where the quality, ingredients and strength are not known, is the most dangerous form to use. Read about the risks of regularly smoking cannabis (link on back page).

### What are the side effects?

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

- decreased appetite
- diarrhoea
- feeling sick
- greater weakness
- a behavioural or mood change
- dizziness
- feeling very tired
- feeling high
- hallucinations
- suicidal thoughts

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 (link on back page).

CBD and THC can affect how other medicines work. Always discuss possible interactions with your specialist. CBD can also affect how your liver works, so doctors would need to monitor you regularly.

### How do I get a prescription?

You cannot get cannabis-based medicine from your GP – it can only be prescribed by a specialist hospital doctor.

The specialist doctor will discuss with you all the other treatment options first, before considering a cannabis-based product.

A prescription for medical cannabis would only be given when it was believed to be in your best interests, and when other treatments hadn't worked or weren't suitable.

### Will the laws on cannabis be relaxed?

The government has no intention of legalising the use of cannabis for recreational (non-medical) use. Possessing cannabis is illegal, whatever you're using it for. That includes medical use unless it has been prescribed for you.