

# Understanding the Side Effects of Medical Cannabis



**Medical cannabis** is a prescribed treatment that can help with certain health conditions. However, like all medicines, it can have side effects. People may react differently, and scientists are still studying the long-term effects.

## To use medical cannabis safely, it's important to:

- Follow your doctor or prescriber's advice and take the correct dose.
- Tell your doctor or prescriber if you have any side effects.
- Share your complete and accurate medical history with us so that we can check if medical cannabis is right for you.
- Ask questions if you don't understand the risks.
- Always talk to your doctor, prescriber or registered GP before changing your medication.
- This guide gives information but does not replace medical advice. In an emergency, call 999 or go to the nearest hospital.

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## How We Reduce the Risk of Side Effects

To help make sure you use medical cannabis safely, your doctor will:

- Discuss the benefits and risks with you.
- Start you on a product with more CBD and less THC, as this may reduce side effects.
- Recommend low doses to start with, increasing slowly if needed.

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# Side Effects and When to Get Help

Below are possible side effects grouped by how serious they are, and what you should do if they happen. This list does not include every possible side effect.

## 1. Mild Side Effects

These are common and usually go away on their own:

- Dry mouth and dry eyes (feeling thirsty or eyes feeling irritated).
- Feeling sleepy or tired.
- Dizziness (feeling lightheaded for a short time).
- Increased hunger.
- Feeling happy or relaxed (euphoria).
- Coughing (if inhaled).

### **What to do:**

- These side effects usually improve over time.
- If they don't go away or bother you, speak to your doctor.

## 2. Moderate Side Effects

These happen less often but may need medical advice:

- Feeling sick or vomiting.
- Feeling confused or disoriented.

- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations).
- Fast heartbeat.
- Feeling anxious or sad (anxiety or depression).
- Memory or thinking problems (these usually improve after stopping cannabis).

### **What to do:**

- Contact Alternaleaf or your doctor if you have these symptoms.
- Your doctor may change your dose or suggest other treatments.
- It may also help to talk to your registered GP, as the symptoms might be caused by something else.

## **3. Severe Side Effects**

These are rare but need urgent medical attention:

- Severe anxiety or panic attacks (feeling very scared or overwhelmed).
- Psychosis (seeing or believing things that aren't real, feeling paranoid, or feeling extremely powerful). You can read more about the symptoms of psychosis [here](#).
- Chest pain, trouble breathing, or irregular heartbeat (especially in people with heart problems).
- Cannabis Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS) (severe vomiting after long-term cannabis use).
- Risk of dependence (feeling like you need to use cannabis regularly).

### What to do:

- Call 999 or go to A&E if you have serious symptoms.
- Contact Alternaleaf as soon as possible.

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## Other Risks

- Pregnancy and breastfeeding: Both CBD and THC can pass to a baby. Cannabis may increase the risk of premature birth and affect a child's development.
- Brain development in young people: People aged 18-24 are at higher risk of memory and learning problems. If you are in this age group, watch for changes in mood or thinking and talk to a doctor if you have concerns.
- Most side effects occur at high doses of THC and at the doses of medical cannabis routinely prescribed, the small amounts of THC will have minimal side effects when taken according to the medical advice.
- There is conflicting data that smoked cannabis may cause lung cancer. There is no evidence that vaporised cannabis or non-inhaled oral cannabis causes lung or any other type of cancer.
- The lethal dose of cannabis is currently unknown.

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# Reporting Adverse Reactions

Adverse drug reactions (ADRs) and side effects are both unintended responses to a medication. But ADRs are harmful and more unexpected than side effects. Side effects are more predictable than ADRs. Side effects can be beneficial or harmful, whereas ADRs are usually harmful.

In the UK, ADRs and harmful reactions to medicines should be reported to the Yellow Card Scheme. This helps keep medicines safe.

## How to report:

- Visit the Yellow Card website (<https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk>)
- Use the Yellow Card app on your phone.

If you have any concerns, always speak to your doctor before **stopping or changing** your medicine.