

# CANNABIS AND ALS

## What is cannabis?

Cannabis is a plant that contains compounds called cannabinoids. The two major cannabinoids that cause the drug-like effects of cannabis are: tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD).

Cannabis products may contain mainly CBD or THC or have a mixture of both. THC is what creates the feeling of euphoria, or what some people will call feeling “high”. CBD does not cause euphoria but may produce some of the effects of THC like feeling relaxed. The type of product you choose to use will depend on the effect you want or symptoms you are trying to manage.



## Is cannabis safe for people with ALS?

Some people with ALS use cannabis to help treat their symptoms. Others may use it simply to relax and enjoy the euphoria (sense of bliss). Cannabis use is generally safe for people with ALS. Before you use cannabis, check with your healthcare professional or pharmacist. This is to ensure that any medicines you take will not react with the cannabis in an adverse or harmful way. If you already use cannabis, make sure your doctor is aware of your use.



## How do you use cannabis?

Cannabis can be found in many forms and can be used in different ways. Below are a few of the ways cannabis can be used.

**VAPING:** Some people with ALS may have trouble breathing. People with breathing problems may find smoking cannabis irritates their lungs. For some people, vaping may be easier. Vaping involves using a device that heats cannabis to the point where it turns into a smokeless gas that is inhaled. This tends to irritate the lungs less than smoke.

**EDIBLES:** Edible (meaning you can eat or put in a feeding tube) cannabis products are another option for those who are not able to, or who do not wish to vape or smoke cannabis. These products include edible foods, such as cannabis cookies, drinks, or brownies, as well as cannabis liquids, oils, and capsules. Oils may be helpful for people who cannot easily chew and swallow foods.

When using edibles, remember that it may take a longer time to feel effects, but the effects may last for a lot longer. When vaping or smoking cannabis, the effects tend to occur quite quickly, but do not last as long. For all cannabis products, follow the rule of “start low and go slow”.

**TOPICALS:** Cannabis topicals are applied and absorbed into the skin. Topicals can be in the form of lotions, gels, or creams.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CANNABIS?

- Euphoria (feeling of bliss)
- Feeling relaxed
- Pain relief
- Relief for muscle spasms or high muscle tone
- Increased appetite
- Changes to the way you experience sensations (for example, brighter colours)
- Better sleep
- Reduced mood shifts and enhanced mood

## THE SIDE-EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE:

- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Impaired ability to focus or remember things
- Sweating
- Heart racing
- Vomiting
- Paranoia (intense fear of being threatened without any actual threat)



## MEDICAL AND RECREATIONAL CANNABIS USE

Recreational cannabis is cannabis used for enjoyment rather than medical reasons.

People do not need approval to access cannabis sold in the recreation market in Canada. In most provinces, recreational cannabis is sold in licensed, government approved stores.

Medical cannabis use is when a person uses cannabis under the guidance of a doctor or nurse practitioner. Cannabis clinic staff may also be able to provide you with guidance. One of the most common medical uses of cannabis is to treat pain. A doctor or nurse practitioner can approve the use of medical cannabis. A person living with ALS can then use the approval like a prescription to buy medical cannabis from licensed producers.

For the Health Canada approved list click on the following: [Licensed cultivators, processors and sellers of cannabis under the Cannabis Act - Canada.ca](#). Some insurance companies will cover the cost of medical cannabis. Certain expenses can also be included when submitting taxes when it is medical cannabis.

While cannabis may help treat some of the symptoms of ALS, it is not a cure. Cannabis cannot stop the disease from progressing.

### KNOW THAT WE ARE HERE TO HELP

The ALS Society of Canada can assist in connecting people and families living with ALS in Ontario to support services, equipment, and ALS clinics. We also invest in the most promising Canadian ALS research, advocate federally and provincially for the needs of people affected by ALS, and provide information to empower Canadians affected by the disease. Learn more at [www.als.ca](http://www.als.ca) where you can also find more resources in the “What is ALS?” section.

If you live outside of Ontario, please contact your provincial ALS Society for information on support available in your region.

### Additional Resources

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/health-effects/effects.html>

<https://www.als.ca/about-als/resources/living-with-als/>

Thank you to Dr Colleen O’Connell for her contributions to this fact sheet.

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