



**ST VINCENT'S
HOSPITAL**
MELBOURNE



**The Royal
Melbourne
Hospital**



Western Health



Peter Mac
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
Victoria Australia

MEDICINAL CANNABIS IN CANCER

This information may help answer your questions about medicinal cannabis. Please talk to your doctor about medicinal cannabis and if it is right for you.

What is medicinal cannabis?

Medicinal cannabis is a plant-based medicine. It has been used in other cultures for many years. This plant produces hundreds of chemicals. These chemicals are called cannabinoids. Research has shown the two main cannabinoids from this plant providing medical benefits are:

- tetrahydrocannabinol, also called THC
- cannabidiol, also known as CBD

Is medicinal cannabis legal?

Medicinal cannabis is not the same as recreational use of marijuana. Medicinal cannabis is a treatment that can be legally prescribed by doctors. Recreational marijuana use remains illegal in Australia.

How can medicinal cannabis help you?

You may experience severe symptoms from your cancer or cancer treatment. Medicinal cannabis may be considered when all other

symptom management options have not helped. Symptoms medicinal cannabis may help with include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Appetite increase or decrease
- Pain

Your doctor may consider medicinal cannabis for you, but only after other symptom management options have been tried first. Please talk to your doctor about medicinal cannabis and if it is right for you.

What does the research tell us?

There is some research that shows medicinal cannabis can help to relieve side effects from cancer or cancer treatment. Other studies show that medicinal cannabis is not helpful. More research on medicinal cannabis is needed to understand:

- how it can help
- what the safety issues and risks are

There is no research that shows medicinal cannabis cures cancer.

Medicinal cannabis products

Medicinal cannabis comes in the form of a pill, oil, nasal spray, or oral spray product.

Prescribed medicinal cannabis products are checked for quality. Illegal marijuana is not.



What are the side effects and risks?

Medicinal cannabis can have side effects. Side effects can vary from person to person. Side effects can vary from product to product.

Common side effects include:

- Fatigue and drowsiness
- Dizziness and problems with balance
- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhoea
- Dry mouth
- Appetite increase or decrease
- Problems with thinking and memory
- Feelings of euphoria or depression
- Hallucinations or paranoid delusions

Medicinal cannabis is not appropriate for patients who are pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant, and/or breastfeeding.

Important information for you

If you are being treated with medicinal cannabis you need to be aware that:

- You cannot drive
- You cannot operate machinery
- It is not approved for use in all countries. Talk to your doctor if you are travelling overseas

Access to medicinal cannabis

Medicinal cannabis products are not registered medicines in Australia. Products can only be prescribed by your doctor. You will need to complete a full health assessment first.

If your doctor decides medicinal cannabis is right for you, they need to apply for State and

Commonwealth Government approval to prescribe it. You cannot apply for medicinal cannabis by yourself.

You may be able to receive medicinal cannabis by participating in a clinical research trial. Talk to your doctor to find out if this is possible.

Cost

There is a cost involved to purchase medicinal cannabis. It is not on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). The cost will vary based on:

- Type of product
- Who manufactures it
- Any fees the pharmacy may charge

Some pharmacies may have the product in stock and some may not. It is important to note that your pharmacy may need to order this product for you.

For more information

Please visit the websites below for more information:

Therapeutic Goods Administration

www.tga.gov.au/community-qa/medicinal-cannabis-products-patient-information

Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/condition/sandtreatments/medicinal-cannabis

You can also call the Office of Medicinal Cannabis on 03 9096 7768 for more information.



Important contacts

If you have further questions, please contact your **treating doctor** via your hospital switchboard:

Peter Mac	03 8559 5000
St Vincent's Hospital	03 9231 2211
Western Health	03 8345 1333
Royal Melbourne Hospital	03 9342 7000

In the event of an emergency, please dial 000 for an ambulance or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

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