# Medical Cannabis: Health Considerations

*PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT*

***This handout is for informational purposes only and does not advocate for or against cannabis use. It is important to talk with your clinician(s) about any cannabis use to ensure safe, coordinated care.***

## Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Cannabis use during pregnancy or breastfeeding is not considered safe because cannabinoids can reach the fetus or infant. Research in this area is still limited, and existing studies suggest potential risks.

### Potential Risks During Pregnancy

- Cannabinoids can cross the placenta.
- Some studies suggest increased risk of low birth weight or developmental concerns, though research is ongoing.

### Breastfeeding Considerations

- THC and other cannabinoids can pass into breast milk.
- THC is stored in body fat and can remain in milk for extended periods.
- Possible effects on infant brain development are not fully understood.

**If you are pregnant, planning pregnancy, or breastfeeding, discuss cannabis use with your healthcare provider.**

## Interactions With Other Medications

Cannabis may interact with certain medications. These interactions can increase side effects or change how medications work.

### Examples of Possible Interactions

- **Sedatives or sleep medications:** May increase drowsiness.
- **Antidepressants or anti-anxiety medications:** May affect mood or alertness.
- **Blood thinners (e.g., warfarin):** Cannabis may alter how the body processes these drugs.
- **Seizure medications:** CBD may affect levels of certain anti-seizure drugs.
- **Medications metabolized by the liver:** Both THC and CBD can interact with enzymes involved in drug metabolism.

**Always tell your healthcare provider and pharmacist if you use cannabis so they can review for interactions.**

## Considerations for Older Adults

Older adults may be more sensitive to the effects of cannabis, especially THC.

### Potential Risks

- **Dizziness or balance problems:** May increase risk of falls.
- Confusion or changes in thinking: May increase in those with cognitive impairment.
- **Heart rate changes:** THC may temporarily increase heart rate.
- **Increased medication interactions:** Cannabis may interact with many prescription and over-the-counter medications.

### General Tips

- Start with a **low dose**, especially THC.
- Avoid inhaling smoke due to lung irritation.
- Monitor for changes in sleep, mood, or alertness.

## Chronic Medical Conditions

People with chronic illnesses should use cannabis cautiously and in coordination with a healthcare provider.

Examples of Conditions That Require Extra Care

- **Heart disease:** THC may increase heart rate or blood pressure.
- **Lung disease (e.g., COPD, asthma):** Smoking or vaping can irritate the lungs.
- **Mental health conditions:** Cannabis can affect mood, anxiety, or thinking patterns differently for each person.
- **Liver or kidney disease:** May influence how cannabinoids are metabolized or excreted.

A clinician can help determine whether cannabis is safe to use alongside ongoing treatments.

## Key Takeaways

- Cannabis can pose increased risks during **pregnancy, breastfeeding, older age, or chronic illnesses**.
- Cannabis may interact with medications.
- Discuss cannabis use with your clinician(s) to ensure coordinated and safe care.

South Dakota MEDICAL CANNABIS PROGRAM

medcannabis.sd.gov

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