

# Cannabis

Recent policy changes in a number of states legalizing cannabis suggest a shift in societal attitudes and behaviors around cannabis. University Health Services takes a harm reduction approach to all substance use, including cannabis.

## Health Information

Cannabis has both therapeutic benefits and health risks.

- Benefits are myriad, and are experienced differently by different people. If you are considering using cannabis for medical purposes, we encourage you to consult with a medical provider about your medical symptoms, and various ways to treat them.
- As with any medication or substance, individual experiences with side effects and outcomes will depend on a number of factors, including dosage, frequency of use, method of use, genetics, physical / mental health, and personal history and context.

Consider the following:

- **How do you choose to be an “educated consumer,” “non-user,” and/or “bystander” with cannabis?** Having information about risks and effects, as well as harm reduction strategies, can help you make decisions that align with your health and values, and minimize unintended consequences.
- **If you choose to use, how do you get the good without the not-so-good?** Be aware of potential risks and utilize harm reduction strategies to minimize those.
- **When, where, why and with whom are you using?** In different circumstances, you may have differing experiences - some positive, some less so. Identify your optimal use conditions. Consider the context—time, place, mood.
- **What form of, and source for, cannabis products are you using?** There are multiple ways to use (smoking, vaping, edibles, etc) and you might experience different effects. And even similar products may have different strengths.
- **What is the balance of good and not-so-good effects that you experience over time?** People can simultaneously experience good and not-so-good effects. Do you feel your use tilts toward the good?
- **When was the last time you used?** Because cannabis potency has increased in recent years, the way it affects you after a break in use may have some unexpected aspects.
- **Is cannabis a good match for you personally?** Not all substances are for everyone, so if you experience a pattern of undesirable consequences, maybe cannabis isn't the best choice for you.
- **You are unique.** No matter what research says, or what your friends' experiences are, there is no universal way that people experience cannabis, so your decisions about use are yours to make based on your unique biochemistry, personality and values. You can choose to use, or not to use.
- **Do you have enough unbiased information?** Many organizations have a vested interest in slanting information in an anti-cannabis or pro-cannabis direction. How do you discern which sources will provide you with non-partisan information?
- **How do you support a friend who may be struggling with their use?** Stigmas on cannabis use and on seeking support may prevent someone from able to seek help, even if they are struggling. How can you

## Resources

If you are concerned about your use or someone else's use:

- For UC Berkeley students: Social Services, (510) 642-6074, [uhs.berkeley.edu/socialservices](https://uhs.berkeley.edu/socialservices)
- Marijuana Anonymous/MA World Services, (800) 766-6779 or (510) 287-8873

## Principles of Responsible Cannabis Use

The following is a classic set of guidelines from one of the original cannabis advocacy groups, NORML. It may offer some additional perspectives on the social and societal aspects of cannabis use.

Washington D.C.: The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, the nation's oldest and largest interest group dedicated solely to marijuana law reform, has adopted a set of Principles of Responsible Cannabis Use. NORML maintains that when marijuana is enjoyed responsibly, subjecting users to harsh criminal and civil penalties provides no public health benefit and causes terrible injustices. For reasons of public safety, public health, economics, and justice, the prohibition laws should be repealed to the extent that they criminalize responsible marijuana use. The key points to the Principles of Responsible Use are as follows:

1. Cannabis consumption is for adults only. Many things and activities are suitable for young people, but others absolutely are not. Children do not drive cars, enter into contracts or marry, and they must not use drugs.
2. The responsible cannabis user does not operate a motor vehicle or other dangerous machinery impaired by cannabis. Although cannabis is said by most experts to be safer than alcohol and many prescription drugs with motorists, public safety demands that impaired drivers be taken off the road and that objective measures of impairment be developed and used, rather than chemical testing.
3. The responsible cannabis user will carefully consider his/her setting and regulate use accordingly. The responsible cannabis consumer will be vigilant as to conditions -- time, place, mood, etc. -- and does not hesitate to say "no" when those conditions are not conducive to a safe, pleasant and/or productive experience.
4. Use of cannabis, to the extent that it impairs health, personal development or achievement, is abuse and should be resisted by responsible cannabis users. Abuse means harm. Some cannabis use is harmful; most is not. That which is harmful should be discouraged; that which is not need not be.
5. The responsible cannabis user does not violate the rights of others, observes accepted standards of courtesy and public propriety, and respects the preferences of those who wish to avoid cannabis entirely. Regardless of the legal status of cannabis, responsible users will adhere to emerging tobacco smoking protocols in public and private places.