

## Talking to your healthcare provider: Doctors are people too

Although doctors generally act professionally and are typically thoughtful by nature, they are not immune to the negative stigma associated with marijuana. It is still controversial and your doctor may hold a strong personal bias against it because of his beliefs, experiences, or education. There may be immediate skepticism from your doctor. Don't be alarmed or get discouraged. Allow your doctor to present her or his opinion. If your doctor refuses to have a frank discussion, you have the right as a patient to seek out a second opinion from a physician who is more objective about the value of medical marijuana. Be prepared for disappointment. Many doctors have little real education on the subject. Do you think the doctor's opinion is based on fact and reason or on preconceived prejudices?



## Valid Talking Points

Having several valid talking points is a good idea. Below are some points that you might make with your doctor:

- Tens of thousands of patients report success using medical marijuana. Marijuana is safe and nontoxic. It is plant material.
- Marijuana has far fewer negative side effects than prescription medicines. It has a much lower possibility for addiction as compared to opiates or tranquilizers. Unlike most prescription medicines, marijuana has no level of toxicity.
- The American Medical Association, the nation's largest physician organization, recognizes the medical value of marijuana and has called for rescheduling it from a Schedule I drug.
- Dozens of medical organizations and thousands of professionals world-wide agree marijuana has medical benefits.
- There are administration alternatives to smoking such as vaporizing, edibles, tinctures, or topical application.
- Marijuana is a safe alternative and I believe it may help me.

## Be Smart

If you discuss the option of marijuana with your physician and he or she makes a valid point of why marijuana may not be a good idea for your condition, don't dismiss it just because you want to try it. Your health is at stake so take your trusted physician's opinion into account when making your decision.

**Excerpted with permission from:** Martin M, Rosenthal E, Carter GT. *Medical Marijuana 101*. Quick American Archives, 2012. ISBN-13: 978-0932551931.

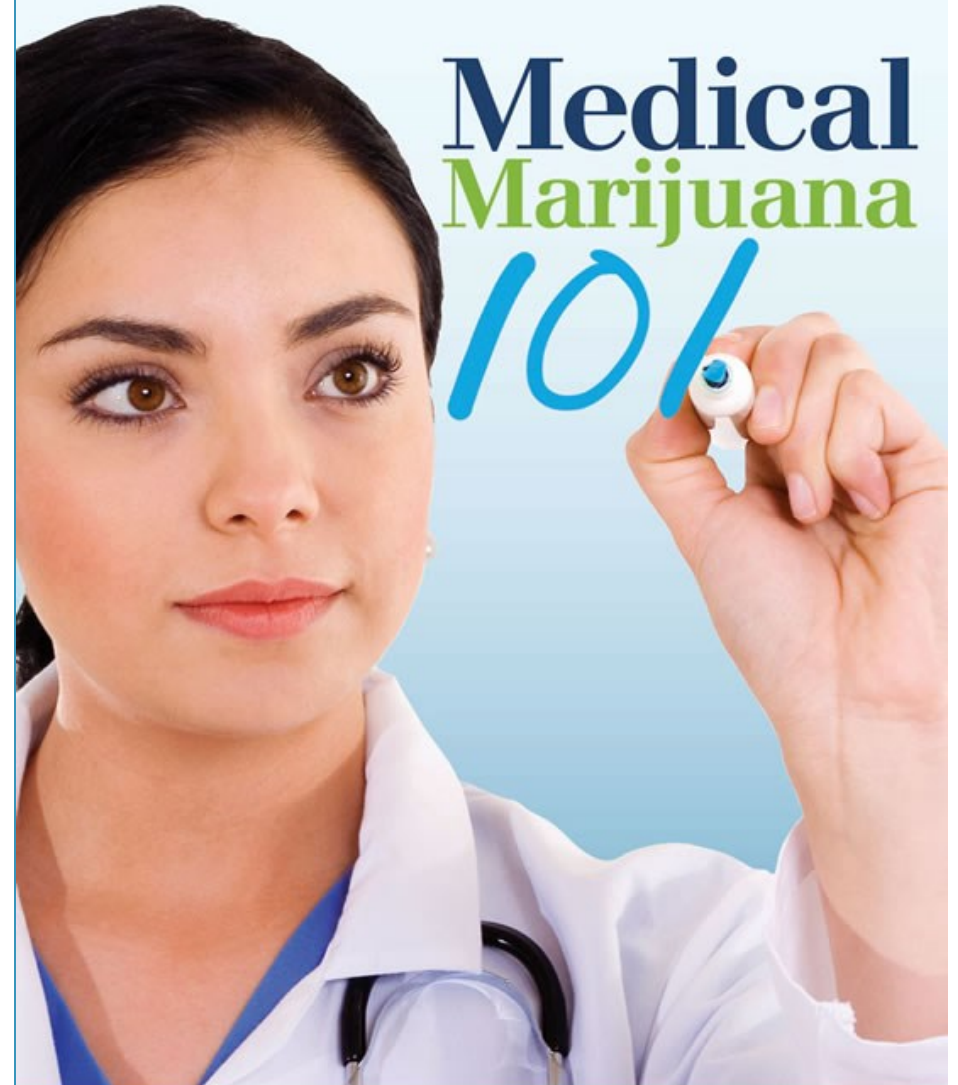
**Developed by** the Medicinal Cannabis & Chronic Pain Project, Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute, University of Washington. <http://adai.uw.edu/mcaccp>. May be downloaded and shared freely, with attribution; may not be adapted in any way or used commercially.

# Talking to Your Healthcare Provider

Excerpted from:

## Medical Marijuana

# 101



by Mickey Martin  
with Ed Rosenthal and Gregory T. Carter, M.D.

## Wonder Drug?

Can marijuana be the wonder drug to heal your disease and take away all your pain and discomfort? Only occasionally. But for many patients marijuana is an effective medicine that enables them to experience an elevated quality of life. Marijuana has been shown to promote individual healing by making many various symptoms more manageable. When pain and inflammation are effectively managed, the body may begin to heal itself.



Marijuana has been used to treat cancer, control chronic pain, improve mental health, and to address the symptoms of glaucoma, HIV/AIDS, congenital disorders, and gastrointestinal conditions. It may well prove to be a natural and effective therapy for your symptoms.

## Why is marijuana an effective medicine?

Marijuana has beneficial uses for many medical conditions. You may have heard jokes about the “munchies,” slang term for the increase in appetite that often follows use of marijuana. For many sick people, appetite stimulation is an important step toward wellness. Proper nourishment is required for us to be healthy, so a substance that increases appetite and eating is essential to the recovery of patients who suffer from anorexia, for example.

Marijuana reduces nausea and vomiting, which often accompanies chemotherapy. Cannabis eliminates the nauseous, sick-to-the-stomach feeling and prevents vomiting, which is violent and physically taxing. Nausea and vomiting lead to dehydration and weight loss, extending recovery time because the body doesn't retain enough nutrients to heal properly. Since marijuana can be inhaled or used as a tincture, it is more effective against nausea than ingesting a pill, which is often regurgitated.

Marijuana is an effective pain reliever, especially in cases of neuropathic or “burning and shooting” types of pain. The anti-inflammatory properties of the active ingredients of the marijuana plant have also proven useful in treating many medical conditions including arthritis and glaucoma.

How does marijuana affect these symptoms? The simple explanation is your body responds to the active ingredients of marijuana, known as cannabinoids, much like it responds to your body's own naturally produced endocannabinoids. Endocannabinoids are found in the brains and bodies of all animals except insects and have evolved over millions of years. The effects of the active ingredients of the marijuana plant, the cannabinoids, mirror the effects of our own internal endocannabinoids.

## How do I know if marijuana is a good medicine for me?

Maybe you've tried marijuana in the past but never really considered its medicinal qualities. Or maybe you've never tried marijuana. The first issue to consider is medical need. Do you have a condition that use of marijuana might benefit?

Always discuss whether marijuana is a good choice with a trusted medical professional. Be aware of local laws and learn about the drug testing regimen used by employers. Because marijuana is reemerging into society as a legitimate medicine, it is less taboo than it once was, but there are still

social and cultural factors that may affect your decision. Friends' and family's concerns and misunderstandings can be overcome with basic education, but you still may experience skepticism from people who have spent their lifetimes hearing that marijuana is a “dangerous,” “illicit” drug only used by felons and reprobates. It is your decision to make, and ultimately it is your health at stake.

Your decision may be influenced by the knowledge that many people find great relief from this natural and powerful plant. Don't decide hastily or under pressure. If marijuana makes you feel better chances are it is a good choice for you. If it does not contribute to your well being, however, or if you experience adverse effects when using it, it is obviously not a good option for you. If using marijuana will cause you to lose your jobs or alienate your loved ones, it's obviously not a good alternative for you. Only you can answer these questions and make the best decision for your situation.

## How do you know marijuana is safe?

Because of the decades of misinformation about the perceived dangers of marijuana, people often question its safety as a medicine. The undeniable truth is marijuana is extremely safe. Consider this: Marijuana has never caused a single recorded fatal overdose.

Animal studies have shown that a lethal dose of cannabinoids would be in the neighborhood of 40,000 times the typical human dose. This would be like taking 40 to 80 pounds of marijuana buds or their extracts all at once. This amount is impossible to consume, so death is not a risk when using marijuana. You don't need to worry about dying from an overdose of marijuana unless you plan to smoke a telephone-pole-sized joint in 10 minutes or less.

There are certain dangers related to using marijuana. Patients report adverse effects such as feeling overwhelmed, panicked, paranoid, or experiencing an increased heart rate. Some strains, especially those with extremely high THC content, are more likely to affect new patients in these ways. Strains with high CBD content modulate the effects of THC, so they are less likely to have these adverse effects. Sometimes it's unclear a complaint relates to an adverse reaction or if it is due to the patient's mental state.

Many people have deep-seated fears about using marijuana because of the criminality associated with it. This fear alone can raise your heartbeat. As with many medicines, marijuana affects everybody a bit differently. Marijuana is not a good option for some people, just as with all medicines.

Another potential concern when considering marijuana as medicine is that it is an herb, and if you did not grow it yourself you don't know how it was grown. Unhygienic practices, such as the use of chemical pesticides, leave harsh residues on the plant that are dangerous to ingest or inhale. Molds and fungus also pose a risk to some patients. For these reasons it's best to know where your medicine is coming from.

Any substance can be unsafe if used incorrectly or abused and marijuana is no different. Its effect on some users make them incapable of driving a car, operating machinery, or executing other tasks that require a high level of concentration. Marijuana should always be used in a responsible and controlled setting. If you adhere to basic safety protocols and manage your dosage effectively, you will have a completely safe experience.

