

Medical Cannabis: A Guide to Access

Glossary of Terms

Aroma

Aroma describes smell and/or taste. Aroma is very personal and perceived differently by different people. For medical cannabis, aroma also depends on the strain and can range from earthy, skunky, to even citrusy.

Blend

A cannabis blend combines different strains (see page 3) to achieve a particular desired effect, similar to the way that different tea leaves are blended to create a particular flavor (e.g., English Breakfast).

Bud

The cannabis plant's fluffy-looking flower is referred to as a bud. Buds are used for medical cannabis because they have the highest cannabinoid concentrations in the cannabis plant.

Cannabidiol (CBD)

Cannabidiol, also called CBD, is the second most prevalent cannabinoid in cannabis. CBD may reduce pain and inflammation and is not known to have any psychoactive effects (the euphoria or "high" of THC, see tetrahydrocannabinol on page 4).

Cannabinoid

Cannabinoid is the collective name of more than 85 molecules that make up the active ingredients in cannabis. Cannabinoids can be classified as phytocannabinoids (those made by cannabis plants), synthetic cannabinoids (those made in a laboratory by chemical reactions) and endocannabinoids (those made naturally in the body). The two most predominant forms of cannabinoids in medical cannabis are tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD), which are described here.

Cannabinoid receptors

Cannabinoid receptors are proteins in the body — found predominantly in the brain, nervous system and immune system — that bind cannabinoid molecules. The two main cannabinoid receptors are called CB1 and CB2, and over the past 20 years we've begun to gain a better understanding of their role in our bodies. The binding of cannabinoids to their receptors triggers a chain of biochemical events within a person. The cannabinoid system — endocannabinoid molecules and their receptors — helps regulate pain, mood, appetite and memory. Cannabinoids introduced externally, such as from medical cannabis, bind to these receptors and produce the same effect as our body's own endocannabinoids, except at a higher concentration, thus producing more intense effects.

Cannabis, marijuana

Cannabis is a scientific name and marijuana is a slang term; however, they refer to the same thing and are often used interchangeably. Medical cannabis is sometimes used by people who live with a chronic illness as a way to deal with and alleviate symptoms, such as pain and fatigue. Cannabis has been used in some cultures for thousands of years for medicinal purposes.

Cannabis indica, Cannabis sativa

The two most common species of cannabis plant used for medical cannabis are Cannabis indica and Cannabis sativa (sometimes referred to simply as indica or sativa, respectively). A third type, Cannabis ruderalis, usually referred to as hemp, is now growing in popularity as a source for medical cannabis due to its lower concentrations of THC. While different species have traditionally been thought of as affecting people differently (e.g. indica is thought to have a sedative effect, sativa is considered more of a stimulant), it is now understood that these effects are largely a function of the varying concentrations of different cannabinoids within the plant, so it is more useful to discuss the cannabinoid profile of a given strain or blend.

Collective, cooperative (co-op)

A collective — also called a cooperative or co-op — represents a group of people that come together to share and receive cannabis and can also be called a co-operative. Collectives have memberships and only members receive access to the cannabis they produce. These organizations are not legal in Canada as they are not licensed producers under MMPR regulations (see page 3).

Compassion clubs

Compassion clubs were organizations formed before medical cannabis was legal in Canada. They were originally created as a way to provide information about and access to medical cannabis that was consistent, safe and dependable. Compassion clubs generally have a membership requirement to demonstrate a certain medical diagnosis. These organizations are not legal in Canada as they are not licensed producers under MMPR regulations (see page 3).

Concentrates

Concentrates are made by dissolving the cannabis plant in a solvent to separate the trichomes (see page 4) from the rest of the plant matter, resulting in a high concentration of cannabinoids. Concentrates may be produced in a variety of different forms, such as hash, oils, tinctures, butter, etc.

Delivery

Delivery refers to the different ways in which medical cannabis can be introduced into the body. The two main forms of medical cannabis — herbal and pharmaceutical — each offer different delivery methods.

Herbal cannabis has many delivery methods that can alter the effect or present different side effects. Herbal cannabis may be inhaled through smoking or vaporizing, ingested orally in capsules or edibles such as baked goods, sprayed on the inside of the mouth or under the tongue, used topically in ointments and salves or even used as a suppository. Inhalation of herbal cannabis produces effects more quickly because the cannabinoids are introduced to the bloodstream more directly than when cannabis is digested.

Pharmaceutical or synthetic cannabinoids come in a capsule or pill form or as a spray that is applied under the tongue. Like other pharmaceutical products, these products have undergone clinical trials in people to understand how they work, their effects and risks.

Regardless of the method of delivery, it is advisable to begin with low doses at first so that your body has an opportunity to adjust to the medicine and to monitor your reaction as dosing levels increase.

Dispensary

A dispensary, similar to a compassion club, is simply a place where a person accesses cannabis. Medical cannabis dispensaries are not legal in Canada as they are not licensed producers under MMPR regulations (see page 3). Vancouver has recently regulated medical cannabis dispensaries and other municipalities are considering doing the same. Despite this municipal regulation, they remain illegal under federal law.

Edibles

Edibles and “medibles” are foodstuffs that contain cannabis extracts. Typical examples include baked goods, drinks and candies. Cannabis-infused butters or oils can be used to make edibles. Eating cannabis takes longer to have an effect than smoking or vapourizing it because the cannabinoids need to be absorbed through the digestive system. Edibles have only recently been approved in Canada as a legal form of medical cannabis.

Flowers

Cannabis flowers (commonly referred to as buds) are the reproductive part of the female plants. Cannabis flowers are hairy, sticky, crystal-covered and they are picked, dried and used as medication. When flowers are fertilized by the male plants, seeds are produced; however, if the flowers are not fertilized, they will continue to make active cannabinoids until they are harvested or until they die.

Hemp

Hemp is a fibre made from the cannabis plant and looks similar to a coarse cotton fibre. In Canada, hemp’s commercial production and cultivation has been approved and regulated by Health Canada since 1998. A number of products are created from hemp, including rope, paper, clothing and beauty products. Hemp does not contain any psychoactive ingredients.

Herbal cannabis

Herbal cannabis is made of the plant’s dried flowers and leaves. There are a few different ways that herbal cannabis can be taken — it can be ingested, inhaled or applied topically. Herbal cannabis is different from pharmaceutical preparations because it is cultivated, bred and grown, rather than produced in a lab through a series of chemical reactions.

Hybrid

Hybrid is a term that is used to refer to cannabis plants created by crossing two or more strains. Usually hybrids are created for specific results, for example, to exaggerate the best features of the original plants; however, hybrids can also occur in nature by chance.

Licensed producer

A licensed producer is authorized by Health Canada to sell cannabis in Canada for medicinal purposes. Health Canada carefully monitors licensed producers by ensuring strict guidelines are followed and by carrying out regular inspections to verify this compliance. Licensed producers need to follow stringent quality control processes and standard operating procedures since medical cannabis is a controlled substance under federal law.

Medical cannabis

Medical cannabis refers to the use of cannabis plant material for medical purposes, typically to treat symptoms, such as pain and fatigue, among others. Medical cannabis can be taken either in plant form (dried) or as an extract that contains cannabinoid molecules, such as tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD).

Marihuana Medical Access Regulations (MMAR)

Health Canada regulations in effect from 2001 to 2014, which governed legal access to cannabis for medical purposes. Once approved under the MMAR, individuals had three options for obtaining a legal supply of the product: 1) they could access Health Canada's supply of dried cannabis; 2) they could obtain a personal-use production licence; or 3) they could designate someone to cultivate on their behalf with a designated-person production licence. lois-laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2001-227/index.html

These regulations were replaced in 2014 by the Marihuana for Medical Purposes Regulations (MMPR — see below).

Marihuana for Medical Purpose Regulations (MMPR)

Health Canada regulations in effect since 2014, governing what is considered legal access to cannabis for medical purposes. In response to concerns from stakeholders that the previous Marihuana Medical Access Regulations (MMAR) system (see above) was open to abuse, after extensive consultations the Government of Canada introduced the new Marihuana for Medical Purposes Regulations (MMPR) that were published in the *Canada Gazette*, Part II on June 19, 2013. The new regulations aim to treat herbal cannabis — as much as possible

— like any other medication by creating conditions for a new, commercial industry that is responsible for cannabis production and distribution. As of April 1, 2014, the MMAR were repealed (no longer in effect) and the only legal way to access medical cannabis is through the process outlined in the new MMPR: www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2013-119/

Oils

Cannabis oil is oil that contains high concentrations of cannabinoids, such as THC and CBD. The safest and easiest way to prepare cannabis oil is by simmering cannabis flowers and leaves for a few hours in vegetable oil, a process that extracts the THC, CBD and other cannabinoids from the plant into the oil. This oil can then be used in baking and cooking to prepare edibles. Cannabis butters can also be made this way.

Pharmaceutical preparations

There are two pharmaceutical preparations of medical cannabis that are approved and available in Canada:

1. **Nabilone (Cesamet)** is a synthetically-produced cannabinoid similar to THC, prepared in a lab through a series of chemical reactions. It is approved to help alleviate chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting and anorexia associated with HIV/AIDS. Nabilone is ingested as an oral capsule.
2. **Nabiximols (Sativex)** is a cannabis-derived mouth spray that contains THC and CBD. It is approved for pain associated with multiple sclerosis and cancer.

Pharmaceutical cannabinoids have undergone research and clinical trials to demonstrate safety and effectiveness and have been approved for human use through the processes required by Canada's Food and Drugs Act.

Strain

In much the same way that different breeds of dog are the same species but have widely different characteristics, a strain can be thought of as a “breed” or variety of cannabis plant that has distinct properties and cannabinoid profile. Strains are developed to produce distinct desired traits in the plant, most notably particular concentrations of the cannabinoid molecules THC and CBD. They are usually named by their producers (or by creative consumers) to reflect the plant's appearance, its place of origin or the effects it induces. Because of their unique properties, different strains will affect people differently and some trial and error may be required to find the strain or combination of characteristics that works most effectively for a given individual.

Terpenes

Terpenes are molecules that play a large role in the aroma and flavour of a strain of cannabis. They work together with THC and other cannabinoids and change the effects of cannabis.

Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)

Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, also known as THC, is the principal active cannabinoid in cannabis. THC's typical effects include psycho-activity (particularly euphoria or the “high”), pain relief and drowsiness.

Tincture

Tinctures are liquid cannabis extracts that are taken under the tongue to provide fast effects. They are typically made with a solvent, such as glycerol or alcohol.

Topical

A topical is a cannabis-infused lotion, ointment, salve, balm or oil that is applied externally to affect a particular location on the body and is absorbed through the skin. Topical cannabis is often used to treat muscle aches and soreness through application to the affected area.

Trichomes

Trichomes are glands found on the cannabis plant's leaves and flowers that contain cannabinoids.

Vaporizer

A vaporizer is a device used to heat cannabis flowers or cannabis-infused oils just under the point of combustion, thereby eliminating or significantly reducing the presence of smoking by-products. It vaporizes the cannabinoids, which can then be inhaled. The effects are delivered quickly just like smoking, but with fewer potentially harmful by-products than smoking.

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