

Introductory Guide  
For New Medical Marijuana Patients  
January 2018

**Purpose**

This brief introductory guide to medical marijuana use is intended to provide the basic information I believe Naturally Healing MD medical marijuana patients need to initiate safe medical marijuana usage. In my experience, over time, by following the guidelines provided, patients will find that medical marijuana can effectively reduce many symptoms that may impact their quality of life, like pain, anxiety, and insomnia. I look forward to helping you find the relief you seek!

**Your Medical Marijuana Recommendation**

After your visit with Laurie Vollen, MD, a Board Certified Preventive Medicine physician, licensed by the state of California, you will be given a valid medical marijuana recommendation for the State of California. Most recommendations issued by Naturally Healing MD are valid for one year - although some physicians issue recommendations for shorter durations.

This medical recommendation is your legal document that entitles you to the benefits of proposition 215, passed by the state of California in 1996. This groundbreaking law allows Californians with valid recommendations legal access to marijuana through the California dispensary system, where marijuana is legally sold.

Beginning in 2018, dispensaries can now apply for licensure as an Adult Use dispensary under Proposition 64, passed in November 2016. Those granted licensure will sell their cannabis products to adults 21 years or older, regardless of their status as medical marijuana patients.

Some cities (e.g., Berkeley and Oakland) have already issued permits and many of their permitted Medical dispensaries are now expected to serve the recreational market as well beginning January 1, 2018. Others (e.g., Los Angeles and San Francisco) are aiming to license recreational dispensaries early in 2018, but just recently passed the ordinances that will govern their cities recreational dispensaries, so have yet to issue permits. And some are taking a wait and see approach.

If access to any dispensary in California is your goal, a medical marijuana recommendation will insure you have access to dispensaries in both the state of California as well as a few other states with reciprocity: (Hawaii, Nevada, Arizona, Michigan, Maine, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, New Hampshire). The vast majority of the State will still require a physician recommendation to legally purchase cannabis in early 2018. As time goes on, more and more dispensaries will convert and I expect, by the end of the year, most of the State's dispensaries will serve both Medical and recreational clients. In addition, new adult use dispensaries will open as municipalities pass ordinances allowing them.

### Cost of Your Medicine

Your medicine is going to become more costly in 2018. With the legalization of adult-use cannabis, the city and the state will increase taxes on cannabis sales at all California dispensaries and delivery services. The specific tax increases depends on your city. Harbourside Health Center in Oakland has stated taxes will increase from 14.25% to 34.25%. Proposition 64 exempts medical marijuana patients with a valid medical marijuana recommendation and a State issued card from retail sales tax (about 7.5% - 10%).

If you spend about \$100/month or more on cannabis products, it is going to be worth your while to obtain a medical marijuana recommendation and then the State card. The State card cost is \$100 (\$50 for MediCal patients).

To help patients obtain the State card, Naturally Healing MD has scouted out the process and developed a packet to help patients complete the

process. The State Card packet is available at the office and includes a guide to the process, the application you must complete in advance, and telephone numbers for the facilities issuing the State card.

The State card also provides extra protection if you are challenged by law enforcement for possessing, growing, or transporting personal use cannabis within the limits authorized by California's law. It is the only form of identification California police are authorized to accept as confirmation of a valid medical marijuana recommendation.

A State card is also accepted at all California dispensaries as proof of status as a medical marijuana patient.

For more information on your legal rights under proposition 215, I recommend you visit this website:

[www.canorml.org](http://www.canorml.org)

Naturally Healing MD cannot offer legal advice. However, we update current patients on important changes relevant to medical marijuana in the state of California through email.

Many patients think that they need a "card." However, a card is simply a convenient way to carry your recommendation around in a wallet. The paper recommendation is your legal document. Naturally Healing MD can make you a "card" for an additional \$15.

### **Obtaining your Medicine**

Throughout California, there are "dispensaries" that provide patients with medical marijuana products. Some dispensaries are "brick and mortar" operations and have a physical store you can go to; other dispensaries are only delivery services, without a storefront.

You can find some (not all) dispensaries listed at:

[www.weedmaps.com](http://www.weedmaps.com)

With your recommendation, you can use any dispensary in California you choose. Those dispensaries serving medical marijuana patients only will require that you show your current medical marijuana recommendation, along with a valid ID (usually a California Identification Card or California Driver's License), to the dispensary. Naturally Healing MD recommendations are internet verifiable, so the dispensary can check the validity of your recommendations 24 hours a day.

Price, products, and "ambiance" do vary from place to place. I believe that high quality, reliable products, can be purchased now in the Bay Area.

### **Beginning to Use Medical Marijuana**

Naturally Healing MD is a unique service that is designed to offer patients the support they need to begin to safely use cannabis. That advice includes how to administer the medication (modes of administration include: inhalation, sublingual, edible, and topical), starting dosage, and frequency.

Unlike getting a prescription for a pill, where you simply go to a pharmacy, pick it up, and pop it in, YOU choose your product(s) at the dispensary. And there are many to choose from. There are tens of thousands of products currently. And the market is rapidly growing.

The choice of what to use and how to use it is in YOUR hands. Therefore, you need to learn the basics, so you can make good choices. The purpose of this guide is to introduce you to the different choices IN ADVANCE of your appointment.

### **The Four Ways to Administer Marijuana**

There are four ways to administer cannabis - through the lungs, through the oral cavity/mouth, through the stomach, and through the skin. What follows is a brief synopsis of these methods and important differences.

### Lungs (Inhalation)

There are three ways to "inhale" marijuana:

Combustion (Smoking) Marijuana

Herb Vaporizing

Concentrate Vaporizing (also known as "Pen Vaporizers")

Combustion (Smoking) of marijuana is typically done with a pipe, bong, or "joint." It entails lighting the marijuana with a flame.

Herb Vaporizing entails heating up marijuana with a heating device - a vaporizer. There are no flames entailed.

With inhalation, the effects begin within minutes.

Pen vaporizers are a trendy and discrete way to inhale cannabis oil. However, the safety of inhaled concentrates has not been established, common additives to cannabis oils are known carcinogens (such as Propylene Glycol (PG) and polyethylene glycol (PEG) and until large groups of pen vaporizing patients are followed long term, the health impact of this form of administration cannot be known.

Therefore, at this point in time, I cannot RECOMMEND this form of administration. For the sake of the many thousands of people who are currently using pen vaporizers, I hope they are safely inhaling an oil or wax distillate into their lungs. But they should know: THERE ARE NO STUDIES DEMONSTRATING PEN VAPORIZER'S LONG TERM SAFETY. I recommend waiting for safety data before trying this method. In addition, concentrates

are often HIGHLY concentrated. Dose can be difficult to control. One more reason Pen Vaporizers are not a good starting method for new patients.

### Oral Cavity (Sublingual)

The oral cavity - primarily underneath the tongue - has many arteries and veins. A properly designed product can be well absorbed underneath your tongue. Sublingual (under the tongue) products currently on the market include:

- Sprays
- Drops
- Strips
- Tabs

There are lots of similarities between sublingual usage and inhalation. The effects are usually felt within minutes, start wearing off in 2 hours, and are appreciably gone after 4 hours.

There are far fewer sublingual products on the market than 'buds" (the marijuana flower). And, per dose, they are more expensive. However, over time, I expect prices of sublinguals to drop. For patients who are not currently "inhaling," sublingual products are probably the easiest and safest way to begin cannabis use.

### Stomach (Edible or Ingested)

Marijuana products that are swallowed - also called edibles - for absorption through your stomach can have an EXTREMELY different effect than inhaled or sublingual products. In my experience, this is where patients can get into "trouble." AND MANY PATIENTS HAVE GOTTEN INTO TROUBLE because of edible products.

After an edible product (e.g., cookies, candy, drink, tincture) is consumed, it lands in the stomach, where it mingles with other recently ingested items. It can remain in the stomach for up to five hours before it is absorbed. But before it enters your bloodstream, it is metabolized by the liver. How quickly

the product is metabolized by the liver and sent into the bloodstream depends on the contents it intermingles with in the stomach, as well as individual variation. Herein lies one of the problems: time of onset.

Patients who ingest cannabis-containing products may unwittingly assume that, after some time has passed with little to no effect, they have not taken an adequate dose of cannabis. They then consume more product. If they end up consuming more than what they need, patients may feel "stoned" several hours later and remain so up to nine or more hours after the last dose.

Further complicating matters, ingested marijuana is metabolized by the liver into a longer-acting, more sedating, and more psychoactive substance before entering the bloodstream. This is unlike inhaled or sublingually administered product, that directly enter the bloodstream. Therefore, the effect of edible products is different from the effects of inhaled or sublingually administered product.

Ingested products are rarely my first recommendation for initiating cannabis use. Typically, I advise starting with other forms of administration, and reserve ingested products for patients who have not found success through other modes of administration or those who need to supplement their other forms of administration.

On some occasions, when patients are looking for a product to kick in while they are asleep, edible products, with their delayed onset, might be appropriate. For those needing help falling asleep and staying asleep, a product that you suck on (like a lollipop or chew) can produce both sublingual effects that are more immediate and edible effects - from swallowing the product - that are more delayed.

For those patients relying on ingested products, they are most effective when taken at about the same time every day and coordinated with eating/drinking times. Tinctures or liquids are most readily absorbed. Solid products, like cookies and brownies, might have unevenly distributed ingredients,

complicating the effect of each bite. However, some manufacturers are addressing this issue, striving for uniformity of cannabis in their product.

CBD only products, if they are THC-free, do not have psychoactive effects when ingested. Therefore, as long as the product is lab tested and has been verified to have little to no THC, edible CBD products (including pills) can be ingested without risk of adverse psychological consequences. However, there are very few CBD products that have near zero THC.

CBD manufactured from hemp is usually pooled from multiple sources that may be contaminated with heavy metals, in addition to pesticides. This is an on-going concern and I currently do not recommend Hemp-based CBD unless it is lab tested.

### **Skin (Topical)**

There is very little scientific literature on topical application of medical marijuana. Currently there are two types of products applied to the skin: liquids (lotion/oil/cream) and patches.

Liquids are only appropriate for a localized condition - such as highly localized neck pain. It is important that patients buy lab-tested products, to ensure there is cannabis in the product. And start with a small area of usage, ensuring that there is no allergic reaction, before using the product more liberally.

Transdermal patches are the newest form of administration of cannabis. The product is applied to the skin and the ingredients are slowly absorbed into the body. Because the product is new, scientific data on their effectiveness is lacking. However, several Naturally Healing MD patients have found them to be effective (and expensive). To have maximum benefit topical products should have a cannabis concentration of 4% or more.

### **Marijuana Strains**



There are two different strains of marijuana - Indica and Sativa. They differ genetically. Indicas are more relaxing and Sativas are more stimulating.

Hybrids are mixtures of Indicas and Sativas. In general, patients wishing to be "actively engaged in activities" (housecleaning, cooking, reading, etc) should be using a Sativa or Sativa-dominant hybrid. Those wishing to go to sleep, or physically relax, should be using an Indica or Indica-dominant strain. Many patients use a Sativa or Sativa-dominant strain during the day and an Indica or Indica-dominant strain at night.

The Indica/Sativa distinction will soon be outdated. It will be replaced by a more detailed lab analysis that will characterize "Chemovars" - defined by a multitude of active ingredients present in the sample.

### **Marijuana's Active Ingredients**

There are about 500 different components in marijuana that have been identified. The two most researched components are THC and CBD.

THC is the psychoactive substance in marijuana. Taken in appropriate quantities, it helps with many symptoms (e.g., pain and sleeplessness). Taken in high quantities, it results in an alteration of consciousness that some find pleasant and some find unpleasant. Taken in even higher quantities, THC can produce anxiety. Patients do not need to feel "stoned" to get the medicinal effects of cannabis.

CBD is non-psychoactive. It also reduces the psychoactivity of THC. CBD has been found to reduce pain, anxiety, muscle spasm, nausea and loss of appetite, depression, and helps counteract the effect of THC on short-term memory.

It is a well-documented side effect of THC - you do not remember as much while you are under the influence of THC as when you are not (although small dose marijuana has not been well studied). However, CBD in small quantities used either with or before THC counteracts this effect.

As lab testing and research becomes more extensive, more information on the effect of other ingredients, like Terpenes, will become available, helping patients make appropriate Chemovar choices.

## **Dose and Frequency**

The key to using marijuana effectively is finding the right strain, taking the right dose, and using it at the correct frequency. I always recommend starting low and gradually increasing the dose until finding what you need to get the desired effect. Below are starting doses I recommend for most patients. However, my recommendations vary according to a patient's history.

### Starting Dose

Inhalation: 1mg THC  
1+ mg CBD

Sublingual: 2.5 mg THC  
2.5 mg CBD

Edible: 2.5 mg THC  
2.5 mg CBD

## **Frequency**

Frequency depends on the symptom being treated. For example, chronic pain that is experienced all day and perhaps all night, usually is treated with multiple doses of marijuana (e.g., four times a day) while other symptoms, like sleeplessness, requires only one dose.

In general, the effects of inhaled and sublingual marijuana are about four hours. CBD prolongs the effect of THC. THC taken through edible products can remain active for nine or more hours.

## Keep a Diary

To track the effect of the medicine on your health, it is highly recommended you keep a diary.

The format for each entry is:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Intention: (like read, make decision, clean, stretch, sleep) \_\_\_\_\_

Symptom Level (like anxiety, pain, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the least and 5 the most) \_\_\_\_\_

Product or Strain Used (like the name of the flower "Harlequin", or the name of the Product like Care By Design Sublingual Spray) \_\_\_\_\_

Dose: (e.g. number of sprays or spoons of flower) \_\_\_\_\_

Set a timer for two hours (unless you are going to sleep) and answer the following questions:

Intention Achieved? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes: Enjoyed? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Symptom level: \_\_\_\_\_

## Adjusting the Dose

With "Cannabis-Naive" patients, there are three phases I recommend to starting cannabis: initiation, titration, and maintenance. Naturally Healing MD's Treatment Plan, provided for patients who sign-up for the NEW PATIENT PACKAGE, gives specific instructions on all three of these phases, and is developed in concert with the patient to meet their needs.

Initiation is to introduce your body to Cannabis. It is typically a small dose, begun when there are no responsibilities for the day - like driving, work, childcare, etc - which is usually in the evening and sometimes during weekend. This initiation phase is often three days long and the dose may have no appreciable effect.

After initiation, the dose is titrated up. The duration of the titration process is anywhere from a few days to a week. Once you have titrate to the desired level, I typically recommend giving the product and the dose one additional week before assessing for the need for further changes.

For experienced users who are actively using, I typically recommend they consider abstinence for about a week before beginning a new treatment regiment. This approach serves multiple purposes and begins a new approach to a more rigorous deployment of Cannabis.

### **Medication Management**

There are many different options with Cannabis - different components to manipulate, varying forms of administration, tens of thousands of products - and helping you adjust your medication to better meet your needs is one way Naturally Healing MD is trying to make Cannabis more accessible as an effective medicine.

With so many options, patients should not be deterred if their initial foray into Cannabis does not result in unmitigated success. Good news is that 80% of patients who follow-up with Naturally Healing MD six months after being initially seen, have found adequate symptom relief from at least one significant symptom( e.g., pain, anxiety, insomnia, or depression) they sought treatment for, after 1-4 visits.

Medication Management appointments are designed to provide specific instructions on how to adjust your Cannabis use to find effective symptom relief.

## BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT

It is easy to get a "medical recommendation" from a physician. Figuring out how to use marijuana effectively to treat your medical symptoms is the hard part. Most patients new to marijuana expect that one visit to get their recommendation and one visit to the dispensary to get their product is all they need to get the relief they seek. This is the wrong approach to using marijuana for medicinal purposes.

For patients new to cannabis, I highly recommend scheduling for a NEW PATIENT PACKAGE. These appointments provide written recommendations for initiating, titrating, and maintaining cannabis doses for relieving the symptom the patient wants to focus on first.

Choose the symptom you want to focus on first. It is not uncommon for patients to come to Naturally Healing MD with a list of symptoms that looks like this: Insomnia, back ache, stress, neck pain, g.i. problems, depression. While cannabis may be of help for all, to start you must have a singleminded focus. And oftentimes, success with one symptom, significantly improves others. Anxiety reduction through cannabis use often reduces pain, depression and improves sleep, for example.

Since every product does not work for every person, I suggest you consider returning for a medication management appointment, if you are not getting satisfactory relief from your cannabis.

Finally, I have worked with over 10,000 patients and what I have learned is that marijuana is an enormously versatile and effective medication for some of the most common problems encountered in medical care, including pain, anxiety, insomnia, and depression. To harness its medicinal properties, it is best if patients LEARN about the medicine, experience how their body reacts to it, and make adjustments accordingly. I suggest patients look at this process as a journey. Naturally Healing MD is trying to help patients on that journey through education, individualized treatment plans, ongoing support and free classes.

