

Introductory Guide  
For New Medical Marijuana Patients  
Updated  
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**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 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. Most recommendations are valid for one year - although some physicians issue recommendations for shorter durations.

The recommendation is your legal document that entitles you to the benefits of proposition 215, passed by the state of California in 1996. 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.

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.

The recently passed **Proposition 64**, which allows for recreational use of marijuana by adults age 21, does not alter the need for a medical marijuana recommendation to gain access to "dispensaries" (described below ) until the year 2018, when recreational dispensaries are expected to be allowed to open.

### **Obtaining Medical Marijuana with your Recommendation**

Throughout California, there are "dispensaries" that provide patients with valid recommendations 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 dispensaries listed at:

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

Please be sure that the dispensary you choose does LAB TESTING on their products.

With your recommendation, you can use any dispensary in California you choose. You will simply need to provide the 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. Increasing regulation of cannabis products is expected in the future in California. My experience has been 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 provides new patients advice on how to begin to safely use cannabis. That advice includes how to administer

the medication (inhalation, sublingual, edible, topical), the starting dose, and the starting frequency.

Unlike getting a prescription for a pill and going to a pharmacy to pick it up, 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. That will allow more time to discuss which options are best for you to begin with.

Be patient. Each patient is different and it is impossible to predict what exact strain, product, dose, or frequency is ideal to begin. But by following the guidelines Naturally Healing MD provides, you will avoid an adverse experience and, with time, should experience a substantial benefit from your medical marijuana practice.

### **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.

#### **Lungs (Inhalation)**

Inhalation of cannabis is probably the oldest form of administration. Contrary to popular belief, there is no scientifically sound evidence that smoking marijuana leads to lung disease (including cancer) or oral cancer.

There are three currently three ways to "inhale" marijuana:

- Combustion (Smoking) Marijuana
- Vaporizing Marijuana
- Concentrates (oils, waxes)

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

Vaporizing marijuana entails heating it up with a device - a vaporizer. There is no flames entailed.

Inhaling concentrates of marijuana, usually through a "Pen vaporizer" is becoming increasingly popular, because of its convenience. However, I CAN NOT RECOMMEND this form of administration at this time, because there is no safety data on this form of delivery. While I hope it is safe to inhale an oil or wax distillate into the lungs, there simply are no studies that have been performed that suggest it is a safe method. Since lung tissue is relatively sensitive to potential carcinogens, I recommend waiting for safety data before trying this method. In addition, concentrates are often HIGHLY concentrated, and not a good starting method for new patients.

### Mouth (Sublingual)

The oral cavity - 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 at 4 hours.

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

### Stomach (Edible)

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 digested and then metabolized by the liver, before entering the bloodstream. 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.

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.

Ingested marijuana is metabolized by the liver into a longer-acting, more sedating, and more psychoactive substance before entering the bloodstream and effecting your organs. When marijuana is administered through the lungs or the mouth, it directly enters the bloodstream to interact with your body's cannabis receptors.

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

For those patients for whom ingested products are appropriate, they are most effective when taken at about the same time every day and coordinated with eating/drinking times. To ensure the dose ingested, tinctures are recommended. 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, thus making each bite equivalent to all other bites.

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 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 that I am following.

### 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.

### 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.

## **Active Ingredients**

There are about 500 different components in marijuana that have been identified. Currently, two of those components are being actively researched: 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). With a small amount of CBD used at the same time, this short-term memory loss does not occur.

## **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 the THC in inhaled and sublingual marijuana are about four hours. The effects of the CBD are of shorter duration - two to three hours. 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 Dose**

Using the diary system makes it easy to figure out if you should adjust your dose. If your intention was not achieved, or not enjoyed, or your symptom level did not decrease, continue using the same dose for two days, to see if there is any change in your response, and to get used to any side effects.

After two days at the same dose, if it is not effective for you, then you can slightly increase the dose (for inhalation, increase by 1 mg, for sublingual increase by 2.5 mg, for edible increase by 2.5mg).

Again, give it at least two days at a higher dose, before increasing again.

Patients always want to know what the maximum dose is. NO ONE HAS EVER DIED OF AN OVERDOSE OF MARIJUANA. It is virtually impossible. As long as you slowly increase your dose, you will not get into trouble.

However, if you are not getting the effect you are desiring and you are experiencing too great a shift in your consciousness (which often goes away after continued use of the same dose), than it may be time to change the strain you are using or the product. In general, the success rate in reducing pain, anxiety, and sleeplessness in patients I have worked with through medical marijuana is quite high. But there are different responses to different strains and products. Once you have given a product or strain adequate time and it is not working for you, it is probably time to change to a different product or strain. Remember: Approach medical marijuana as a practice that you are cultivating. That way you will be more likely to derive significant medical benefits from it. Naturally Healing MD tries to provide you a framework for cultivating your practice safely and expeditiously.

### **Support Services**

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.

I have worked with 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, patients must LEARN about the medicine, experience how their body reacts to it, and make adjustments accordingly. Therefore, I suggest patients look at this process of initiating medical marijuana usage as a journey. Naturally Healing MD is there to help you find your way on that journey through free classes and follow-up appointments.

