

Smoking Cannabis

ADVANTAGES

Smoking is the most common method of using cannabis (though vaporization is catching up). Cannabinoids, such as THC, in smoked cannabis reach the bloodstream within five seconds of inhalation. Peak blood levels of cannabinoids are achieved within five to ten minutes after smoking. The biggest advantages to smoking cannabis are the speed of effects and the ability to accurately gauge the dose.

RISKS

Smoking cannabis can produce adverse lung effects. Chronic cannabis smoking can trigger bronchitis, lung and throat inflammation. However, there is no current, published evidence that cannabis smoking leads to emphysema or cancer.

TECHNIQUES

Cannabis cigarettes (joints or blunts) are not very efficient, since only about a third of the available cannabinoids is absorbed by this method. Experienced cannabis smokers tend to be twice as efficient as novices at extracting cannabinoids from cannabis cigarettes. Waterpipes (bongs) are more efficient than cigarettes, delivering over 50% of available cannabinoids. Because waterpipes deliver large volumes of smoke, the dose is difficult to gauge. Small glass pipes are the most efficient smoking method, as their small bowls encourage manageable doses. All glass pipes should regularly be cleaned of cannabis tar by scrubbing them with 90% rubbing alcohol and salt, then rinsing with water.

Effective Smoking Technique / Strategies

To properly smoke cannabis, you must both inhale and exhale normally. Studies have shown that breath holding beyond ten seconds does not increase cannabinoid absorption. Use the smallest dose of cannabis that produces medicinal effects. Wait at least ninety minutes between doses of smoked cannabis. When smoking, herbal cannabis flowers with higher cannabinoid content reduces exposure to irritating tars.

There are over 1500 constituents in cannabis smoke, and some of these are known carcinogens. If you choose to smoke cannabis, try these harm reduction approaches. Only smoke medical cannabis that has been screened for the absence of pathogenic molds. Medical cannabis stored

while wet can become moldy. Some of these molds, such as aspergillus, can be harmful, even fatal, if ingested. At Abatin, all cannabis is screened for these molds.

Know the potency of your cannabis and control your dose. A UCLA study, "Effects of varying marijuana potency on deposition of tar and delta 9-THC in the lung during smoking" suggests that smoking cannabis with higher THC content reduces exposure to irritating tars, since less cannabis is smoked to deliver the effective dosage. Regardless, always use the smallest dose of medical cannabis that provides symptomatic relief. Use a pipe and avoid blunts. Cannabis cigarettes are inefficient and only deliver 10 to 27% of their THC content. THC collects in the butt of the joint, condensing up to 50 percent of its THC, making consistent dosage difficult. Blunt wraps contain highly addicting nicotine and tobacco byproducts, and should never be used for medical cannabis administration. Instead, use a clean glass pipe with enough cannabis for a single inhalation, as it reduces waste and enables more consistent and predictable dosage.

Bong pipes can deliver too much medicine and too much tar. Always use less cannabis when smoking a bong pipe, since bongs are designed to deliver smoke deep into the lungs, increasing the likelihood of over medication and coughing. Coughing is not a sign of effective dosage, only overdosage. While water used in bongs can reduce throat irritation caused by smoking, the water also removes more THC than it reduces the amount of inhaled tar. Water bongs are not that efficient, because THC tends to condense in the pipe's water. If throat irritation is an issue, try using ice instead of water to cool the smoke.

Don't hold your breath. Holding your breath to absorb more THC from smoked cannabis doesn't work. THC quickly passes through the human lung into the bloodstream. Breath holding only coats your lungs with potentially irritating tars. Simply inhale deeply, and then exhale. Breath holding is a difficult habit to break, but you'll expose yourself to fewer irritating tars.