

Talking to Your Patients About Cannabis Use

Now that cannabis, or marijuana, is available for retail sale in Connecticut, you may find more of your patients consuming cannabis and cannabis products. It's important to talk with patients about cannabis use so they're aware of the risks and how it may impact their health.

Cannabis, like other substances such as alcohol and tobacco, can have a negative impact on your patient's health. It's important to ask patients about their cannabis use just as you would with alcohol or tobacco.

<p>Possible Health Effects of Cannabis Use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverse interactions with prescription medications • Increased heart rate and blood pressure • Poor lung health (if using products that are inhaled) • Problems with memory and focus • Mental health disorders, including schizophrenia and paranoia • Cannabis use disorder • Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome (associated with long-term use)
<p>What to Ask</p>	<p>When talking about cannabis use with patients, it's important to ask questions including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do they use cannabis? • How much cannabis do they use? • What type of cannabis products do they use? (vape, smoke, edible, etc.) • What is the potency of the products they are using?
<p>Things to Consider</p>	<p>Patients who use cannabis who have specific medical conditions may need to be counseled on possible adverse effects. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients with cardiac, lung and kidney disease • Mental health conditions - Screening can help determine if cannabis use is linked to depression, social anxiety, and thoughts of suicide • Pregnant patients who should be advised that cannabis use could lead to problems for the baby including limited fetal growth, stillbirth, low birth weight and long-term brain development issues • When a patient is being scheduled for a procedure, regular use of cannabis may require increased amounts of anesthesia (such as propofol) and may worsen pain and nausea after surgery and increase the need for pain medication post-op
<p>If Your Patient Uses Cannabis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider your patient's existing health conditions and educate them about the risks of cannabis use • Talk about the importance of storing cannabis in a locked and secure place and out of the reach of young children and pets to prevent accidental ingestion • Introduce the subject of licensed cannabis retailers and dispensaries as a safer alternative to purchasing illicit cannabis. Reviewing product labels can prompt conversation on how ingredients, dosing and potency impact a patient's health • Make sure they understand that cannabis impairs a person's ability to think and react. Individuals should never drive or operate a car or other heavy machinery while using cannabis • Providers should regularly check the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) website for all patients to see what medications may have been prescribed by other providers, including medical marijuana. To access the PDMP go to https://connecticut.pmpaware.net

What to Do if You're Concerned About a Patient's Cannabis Use

If you are concerned about your patient's cannabis use or that your patient may have a cannabis use disorder, offer brief advice and counseling, and make referrals for further treatment when necessary.