

10 Cannabis Harm Reduction Tips

If you choose to consume cannabis, keep these tips in mind to lower your risk.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN CONSORTIUM FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF CANNABINOIDS (CCIC)

Founded in 2000, the CCIC has the mission of sharing research and education about the endocannabinoid system and the therapeutic applications of cannabinoids, and reducing the potential harms associated with non-medical cannabis use. The CCIC represents a group of researchers, healthcare professionals and educators who promote a balanced perspective regarding what the current science says about the biological, health and societal effects of cannabis and cannabinoids.

ABOUT THE ONTARIO CANNABIS STORE (OCS)

The OCS is a Crown agency solely owned by the Province of Ontario, reporting to the Ministry of Finance. It provides access to tested, traceable, legal recreational cannabis for adults 19 and older across Ontario as the sole wholesaler to 1,600-plus privately owned retail cannabis stores and OCS.ca, the province's online cannabis retail store. The OCS remains committed to championing a socially responsible industry and advancing cannabis knowledge across Ontario. Its Cannabis Made Clear hub provides trustworthy, unbiased information for anyone interested in learning about consumption methods, health effects, responsible use and more.

Expert-informed advice for cannabis harm reduction for all people on their cannabis journey.

Brought to you by the OCS in partnership with the Canadian Consortium for the Investigation of Cannabinoids (CCIC), a federally registered non-profit organization that comprises researchers, healthcare practitioners and educators.

TIP #1

Practise harm reduction by trying to make better-informed choices about cannabis use.

Harm reduction is a nonjudgmental approach to education and support for substance use.

You may be familiar with harm reduction principles such as “meet people where they are” and “any positive change,” used with the intent to empower people to use substances more safely without stopping use altogether. For cannabis use, “start low and go slow” is a popular harm reduction motto that guides new or inexperienced consumers.

TIP #2

Limit exposure when smoking cannabis.

Cannabis smoke can linger in the air
and on furniture, floors and indoor walls.

Try to take it outside whenever you can or to well-ventilated spaces, and avoid smoking around people with respiratory challenges. Pets can also be affected by exposure to smoke or vapour, so consider the effects on your non-human friends when consuming in an indoor space.

20%

of respondents
reported exposure to
second-hand smoke
in the home in the
past 30 days.

(Canadian Cannabis
Survey, 2022)

TIP #3

Reduce risks when sharing cannabis products by practising safer sharing.

70%

of people who used cannabis in the past year reported smoking it, which decreased from a previous survey where smoking was 74%.

(Canadian Cannabis Survey, 2022)

When sharing joints, bongs, pipes or vaporizers, you may also be sharing germs or viruses with others.

Smoking is still the most common method of use among Canadian cannabis consumers. Stay safer by using a mouthpiece or cover that you can clean.

TIP #4

Identify risks unique to older adults.

If you are over 60, be aware that the effects of cannabis can last longer because of a slowing metabolism.

Check with a pharmacist about potential complications with medications. Use among seniors grew more than any other age group in Canada after cannabis was legalized. Older people who use cannabis are more likely to be medical users, new users or non-daily cannabis users.

>1%

of seniors reported using cannabis (about 40,000 people) in 2012, which grew to 400,000 people as of 2019.

(Statistics Canada, 2019)

TIP #5

Be aware of how cannabis acts in the brain.

Consuming cannabis activates your brain's cannabinoid receptors, changing the way brain cells communicate with one another.

It also mimics the actions of naturally occurring compounds in the brain called endocannabinoids. These compounds influence actions like hunger, pain and stress, which is why consuming cannabis can produce effects in these areas.

TIP #6

Recognize the signs of dependence.

It's important to keep tabs on changing use.

Need cannabis to get through the day or are there certain activities that you can't do without it?
Experience negative effects when you don't consume it or tried to cut down or quit but can't?
It might be time to change how and when you use cannabis.

Dependence refers to whether substance use is "habit-forming" for the person using it. Dependence on substances is not always harmful, but it can lead to problematic use or addiction. When cannabis dependence becomes problematic for the user, it may meet the criteria for diagnosing cannabis use disorder (CUD).

91%

of those who reported consuming cannabis in the past year did not view it as habit-forming. Users reported cannabis use was more beneficial than harmful across all categories, including physical and mental health, friendships, home life, school and work.

Canadian Cannabis Survey, 2022)

TIP #7

Monitor your mental health and how your cannabis use makes you feel.

51%

of people who used cannabis in the past year self-rated their mental health as “poor,” compared to 17% who rated their mental health as “excellent.”

(Canadian Cannabis Survey, 2022)

Many people feel cannabis helps them with anxiety and depression, though sometimes cannabis with high amounts of THC can worsen mental health symptoms.

If you are worried about someone’s mental health and cannabis use, aim for a nonjudgmental approach to discussing your concerns. Compassion and support will go further for someone who may be struggling and doing the best they can to cope with the tools they have available.

TIP #8

Pay attention to your tolerance to cannabis.

If you're consuming cannabis on a regular basis, you may find that you're becoming "tolerant" to its effects. Pay attention to signs such as needing more or stronger cannabis products to get the desired effects.

40%

of Canadians who reported using cannabis in the past year did so one day per month or less. 18% reported that they use it daily.

(Canadian Cannabis Survey, 2022)

TIP #9

Be aware of stigmas when initiating conversations about cannabis with healthcare providers.

3%

of Canadians who have used cannabis in their lifetime report that they have ever sought professional treatment or counselling for their cannabis use.

(Canadian Cannabis Survey, 2022)

Fear of judgment might make you uncomfortable speaking to your healthcare provider about cannabis. If you have questions about cannabis, consider seeking a provider to better support and guide you.

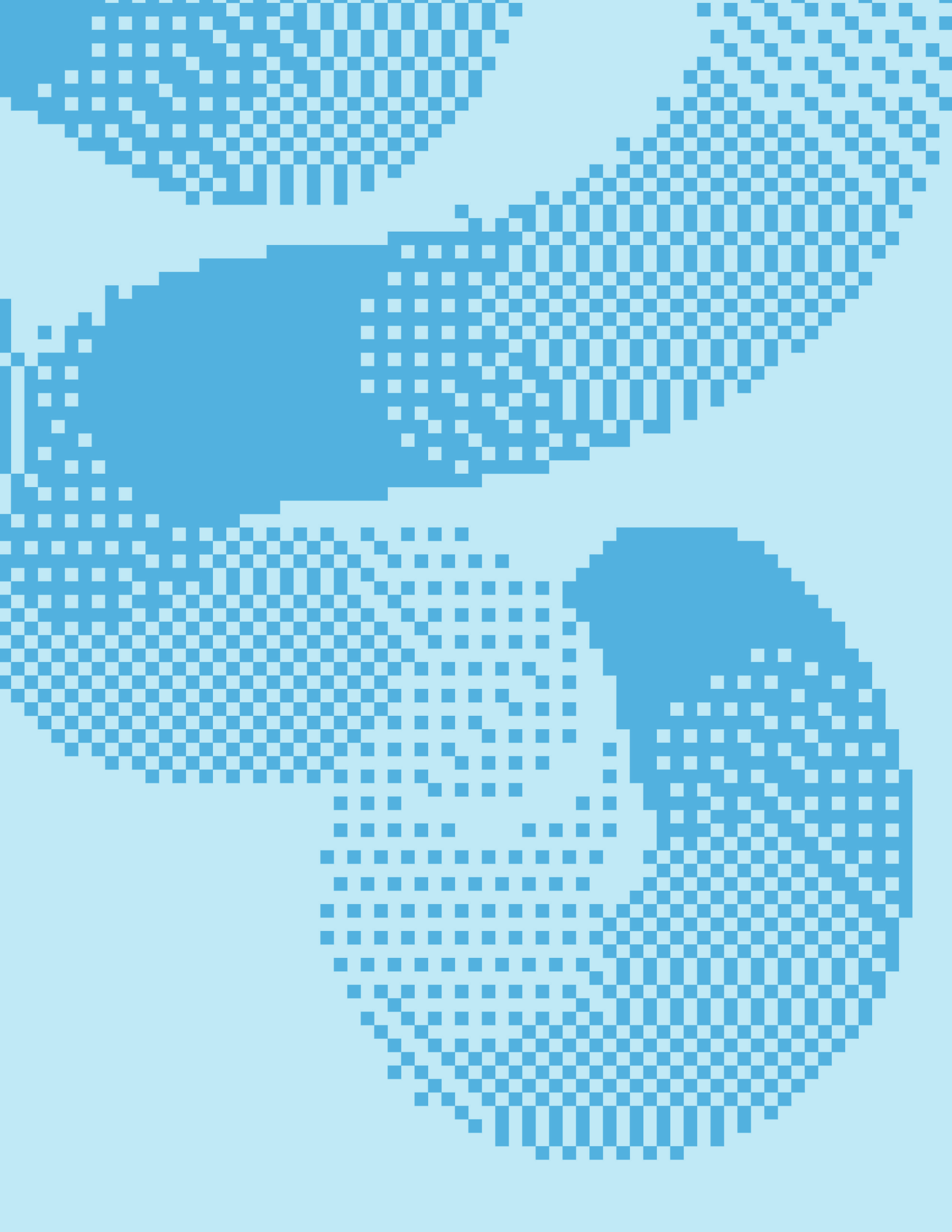
Some healthcare providers have experience with cannabis use for non-medical or medical reasons. The CCIC has resources for physicians and other providers that can help: ccic.net/educational-resources

TIP #10

Learn about common adverse reactions.

Cannabis hyperemesis syndrome is a condition involving severe vomiting that does not stop. This rare condition can happen even if you use cannabis regularly.

Taking an anti-nausea medication, a hot shower and rest may help. Seeking medical care may also be required. Sometimes medical providers in emergency department settings will apply capsaicin cream (found in chili peppers) to mimic the effects of a hot shower.



References

[Health Canada, Canadian Cannabis Survey 2022](#)

[Statistics Canada, 2019 – National Cannabis Survey, third quarter 2019](#)

Resources

The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research

NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING AND MEDICINE

This comprehensive review synthesizes over 10,000 research articles and case reports published since 1999. The report summarizes the potential therapeutic and health effects of cannabis use and highlights areas where additional research is needed.

Consumer Information — Cannabis

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA RESOURCE

Provides information on THC's effects, including advice for different ways of consuming cannabis, such as vaping, eating or drinking. This resource includes advice for cannabis risk reduction.

Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (LRCUG) for reducing health harms from non-medical cannabis use: A comprehensive evidence and recommendations update

RESEARCH ARTICLE

This 2022 article from the *International Journal of Drug Policy* is the latest update to Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines, first published in 2017.

Get Sensible!

RESOURCES FROM CANADIAN STUDENTS FOR SENSIBLE DRUG POLICY

This for youth by youth cannabis education and harm reduction campaign responds to calls for developing and disseminating realistic and evidence-based cannabis education for youth.

Weed Out Misinformation

ENGAGING AND EDUCATING YOUNG-ADULT CANNABIS CONSUMERS

This project from Humber College aims to provide an honest, scientifically based and stigma-free discussion about cannabis that helps people make informed decisions and maximize benefits when they consume cannabis.

NOVA: The Cannabis Question

PBS LEARNING

This film explores the story of cannabis, from the criminalization that has disproportionately harmed communities of colour to the latest medical understanding of the plant.

Waiting to Inhale: Cannabis Legalization and the Fight for Racial Justice

AKWASI OWUSU-BEMPAH AND TAHIRA REHMATULLAH

This book illuminates the stories of those on the front lines of the War on Drugs — the individuals and communities disproportionately harmed, sometimes seemingly beyond repair; the official and social forces ranged against them; and the victims, legal and political activists, and cannabis entrepreneurs fighting back.

