

Dosing medical cannabis

Using medical cannabis is both an art and a science. It is an art because dosing and titrating cannabis to find the optimal dosage for each patient requires a personalized approach — it is a science because there are numerous studies and case reports that support the use of medical cannabis in the treatment of a number of conditions.

Cannabis dosing and titration is a highly individualized, collaborative process between a healthcare practitioner and patient. The physician's role is to provide product/strain recommendations and titration schedules, while the patient monitors their dosage and symptoms to identify their optimal dose. The optimal dose is that which provides effective symptom control with the least amount of adverse effects. Finding the optimal dose may require trying several different products in different amounts. The key is to start with a low dose, titrate slowly, and maintain the lowest dose possible.



Ingestion

Oils and capsules are the common methods of administration and are more widely accepted, as they are similar to taking traditional medication. It also ensures less odour and more accurate dosing. Oils and capsules are also readily available in a number of strengths and combinations of THC/CBD. The onset of action is approximately 1 to 2 hours, and the duration of effect is about 6 to 10 hours. The delayed onset of action must be considered for dosing and titration.



Inhalation

Dried cannabis (flower) is used for inhalation, and inhalation can be done by smoking or vaporizing the cannabis flower. Vaporizing has the advantage of a quick onset of action — 5 to 10 minutes — and a shorter duration of effect of 2 to 4 hours. This method can be used for quick relief of symptoms, such as chemotherapy-induced nausea and chronic pain. An important advantage over smoking is that the vaporizer's heating of cannabis reduces the harmful by-products of smoking, and decreases the pulmonary symptoms that are associated with smoking.

Oral Ingestion

ONSET OF ACTION



1-2 hours

DURATION OF ACTION



6-10 hours

✓ PROS

- Longer acting and less odour.
- Convenient and discreet.
- Advantage for chronic disease/symptoms.

✗ CONS

- Initial titration can be challenging.

Vaporizing

ONSET OF ACTION



5-10 minutes

DURATION OF ACTION



2-4 hours

✓ PROS

- Rapid action. Advantage for breakthrough or episodic symptoms (pain, nausea and vomiting).

✗ CONS

- Dexterity required.
- Vaporizers may be expensive; not all are portable.

Other methods

A number of other forms of administration are available internationally, including topicals, suppositories and beverages. There is limited evidence for their use at this time, and they are not commercially available in Canada.