

# ASK the Pharmacist



Q:

I'm hearing more about medical marijuana these days; what exactly is it and how does it work?

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A:

Medical marijuana is simply the use of cannabis or cannabinoids that has been authorized or prescribed by a health care practitioner for medicinal purposes only. Legal access to marijuana was first granted to be used medically in Canada in 1999 however there are many written accounts of its use medicinally in ancient Chinese records dating as far back as 28th century B.C. Medical marijuana is not available from your local pharmacy but rather from a marijuana producer that is licensed with Health Canada. On the other hand, Cesamet (nabilone) is a synthetic form of marijuana and Sativex spray is formulated with extracts of cannabis and both have been available for many years by a prescription through pharmacies. Medical marijuana differs from the legalization of marijuana that is set to occur on July 1st, 2018 across Canada which will allow for the sale of marijuana for recreational use. We will focus on the use of marijuana for medical purposes only. Medical Marijuana is not considered to be a cure for any diseases or disorders, rather it is used to treat symptoms only. A marijuana plant contains hundreds of chemicals of which more than 100 of them are considered cannabinoids. Cannabinoids are compounds that react with cannabinoid receptors that we have in our bodies. These cannabinoid receptors alter the neurotransmitter release in our brain (neurotransmitters carry information from our brain from cell to cell within our body). Two of the most common cannabinoids are tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD). The THC component is responsible for the euphoric or “high” feeling people experience and is the primary psychoactive or mind-altering agent in marijuana. Thus, that is likely the reason why people use it recreationally. On the other hand, CBD has weak psychoactive properties and is therefore not associated with euphoria. It is still not fully understood how marijuana works to reduce our symptoms but one of the theories is related to the cannabinoid receptors mentioned above. The interaction of these cannabinoids with the cannabinoid receptors inhibits or blocks the messages the brain is sending to various parts of the body. In this way the marijuana is disrupting the abnormal nerve impulses. Medical marijuana can be used for a variety of ailments some of which are nausea & vomiting due to chemotherapy, appetite stimulant for AIDS patients, pain management and seizure control to name a few. We will discuss more on the uses of medical marijuana and the legalities that accompany it in the coming weeks. For more information on this or any other topic, contact the pharmacists at Gordon Pharmasave, Your Health and Wellness Destination.