

REDUCING THE HARMS OF ALCOHOL

People drink for many personal reasons, and not everyone is ready or willing to cut down on their alcohol intake or stop altogether, and that's ok. That being said, we know that heavy alcohol use causes harm to the body, and these harms are quite serious for drinkers. In the short term, alcohol use can impair your decision making, cause blackouts, make you vulnerable to falls and accidents, and lead to dehydration. In the long term, daily, heavy drinking can increase your risk of liver and kidney damage, several cancers, stomach issues, high blood pressure, injury to the brain and nervous system, and harm your immune system. Physical dependence on alcohol can also lead to acute withdrawals, which have the potential to cause seizures, delirium, and other harms.

That's where alcohol harm reduction comes in. This approach tries to meet people where they are with their drinking and reduce the harms of alcohol use in a way that doesn't require abstinence and respects their choices. We asked the members of the Eastside Illicit Drinkers Group for Education, PHS Drinkers Lounge Community Alcohol Program, and SOLID Outreach Society how they used cannabis as an alcohol harm reduction tool, and what advice they had for peers and staff who were involved with a CSP program. This resource reflects those conversations, and is intended to support the implementation of CST programs for people who use alcohol elsewhere.

REMEMBER: START LOW AND GO SLOW

Everyone responds to cannabis in a unique way, and different cannabis products will produce different effects. Consider what types and strengths of cannabis will work best for you. When in doubt, try a small amount of cannabis and slowly increase the dose until you reach a desired effect.

Regular joint / Dried cannabis flower



- Smoked cannabis will produce a less intense effect than an edible cannabis product containing the same amount of THC.
- You should feel an effect shortly after inhaling. Take 1 or 2 puffs, and wait a few minutes to see how you feel. Take more if necessary.
- Participants with histories of lung or breathing problems should exercise caution and consider consulting a health care provider before use.

Cannabis edibles



- The same amount of THC in a cannabis edible will be felt more strongly and differently than the same amount in a joint.
- It can take up to 2 hours for cannabis edibles to work, and their effects will last for a longer period of time.
- If you are trying edibles, start with a small amount (i.e 2.5mg or 5mg), and wait to take more until you feel something. Try not to consume too much, too quickly.

Source: <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-06-CCSA-7-Things-About-Edible-Cannabis-2019-en.pdf>

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

THE CANADIAN MANAGED ALCOHOL PROGRAM (CMAPS) STUDY



CMAPS is a national study of Managed Alcohol Programs in Canada based out of the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research at the University of Victoria. The CMAPS project rigorously evaluates MAPs in Canada and generate insights into their implementation and effectiveness.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT: WWW.CMAPS.CA

THE CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR SUBSTANCE USE RESEARCH (CISUR)



University of Victoria
Canadian Institute
for Substance
Use Research

CISUR is a network of individuals and groups based at the University of Victoria who conduct research about substance use and work with organizations of people who use alcohol and other drugs to develop projects and resources like this one. Check out the following online resources to learn more about cannabis and alcohol harm reduction:

Cannabis substitution for drinkers:

- <https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/infographic-cannabis-substitution.pdf>

Cannabis harm reduction:

- <https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/take-care-with-cannabis.pdf>
- <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/safer-cannabis-use-marijuana-hash-hash-oil>

CONTACT THE CMAPS TEAM:

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CANNABIS SUBSTITUTION PROJECT INFORMATION



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This initiative is supported by Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP).

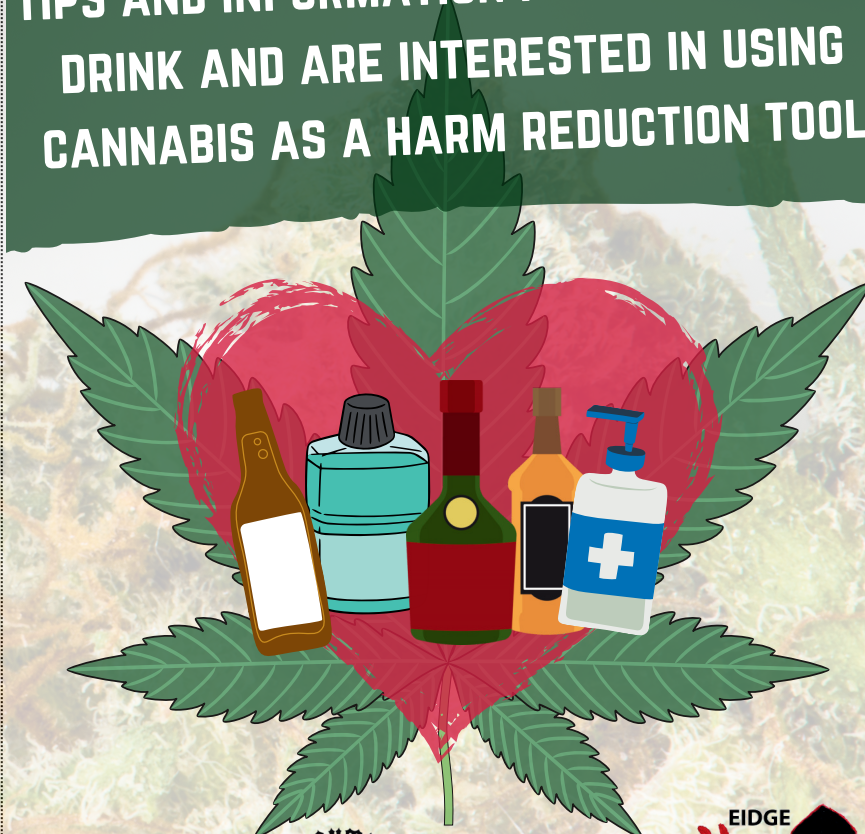


Santé
Canada

Health
Canada

CANNABIS AND ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION

TIPS AND INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WHO DRINK AND ARE INTERESTED IN USING CANNABIS AS A HARM REDUCTION TOOL



University of Victoria
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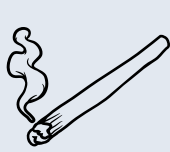


SOME FACTS ON CANNABIS

HOW DOES IT WORK?

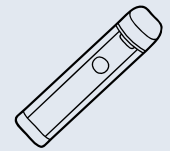
- Chemicals called cannabinoids, including **THC** and **CBD**, interact with your body. THC creates a high, while CBD does not. Mixed research suggests CBD may relieve pain and promote healing.
- There are several different ways of using cannabis. Depending on how you use it, cannabis will effect you differently.

HOW CAN I USE IT, AND WHAT ARE THE TRADEOFFS?^{1,2}



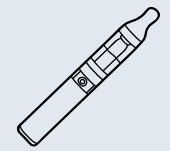
Smoking

- **Pro:** Smoking cannabis is quick, accessible, and allows you to control exactly how high you want to be.
- **Con:** Smoking of any sort will harm your lungs.



Vaporizing flower

- **Pro:** Vaporizing has many of the same benefits of smoking, but with less harm to your lungs.
- **Con:** Vaporizers can be expensive and difficult to access.



Vaporizing oil

- **Pro:** Vaporizing oil has many of the same benefits of smoking or vaporizing, but allows you to avoid inhaling smoke.
- **Con:** Vapes and oil can be expensive, and the health risks of vaping THC oil aren't well understood.



Edibles

- **Pro:** Edibles are a good way to avoid inhaling smoke or vapour of any kind.
- **Con:** Edibles take a while to kick-in, and once they have, it is difficult to control how high you are. They can also irritate your stomach.



Oils, extracts, and teas

- **Pro:** Oils, extracts, and teas are an easy and low-risk way to use cannabis.
- **Cons:** These products can be expensive and hard to access. You should still start low and go slow.

THE BENEFITS OF CANNABIS

Drinker's themselves have reported several benefits from using cannabis that relate to their alcohol use. At the same time, researchers are starting to document these benefits. We have heard that cannabis can help with the following:

- **Cutting down on the number of drinks you need or want each day**
 - Some people use cannabis in place of alcohol. When they would normally have another drink, they substitute a joint or an edible. This allows them to drink less throughout the day without adverse effects.

If you're interested in substituting cannabis for alcohol or using it to help with acute withdrawal, go slowly and don't do it alone. Make sure to taper your drinks carefully, access a daytox or other withdrawal management service, talk to program staff, or call a friend, especially if you have a history of alcohol withdrawal seizure.

- **Coming off or cutting down on other drugs, like opioids and stimulants**
 - Other people report using cannabis to cut down on other drugs while keeping their alcohol use steady or reducing it. This includes depressants like down (fentanyl), or stimulants like side (meth) and rock (crack).
- **Self-management of symptoms as your blood alcohol content drops, together with other supports**
 - Cannabis can also help to reduce or manage the uncomfortable symptoms of withdrawing from alcohol or other drugs, at home or in a detox setting.
 - Cannabis can also help you to want to drink more water and improve your appetite when you're hungover.
- **Maintaining your appetite and soothing your digestive system**
 - Alcohol irritates the digestive system and can reduce your appetite, putting many drinkers at risk of weight loss and nutrition problems. Cannabis can calm digestive problems and bring back your appetite.
- **Sleep, relaxation, and pain relief**
 - Many people live with chronic pain, anxiety, and can have trouble sleeping. Many forms of cannabis can help, and may replace alcohol has a means of self-treatment.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A SERVICE THAT PROVIDES CANNABIS/

Many things make a good Cannabis Substitution Program for people who use alcohol. Here are some questions to ask when joining a cannabis program:

1. **What are the types of cannabis that the program provides? It's nice to have options for strength and route of use to find the best fit for you.**
2. **Can you ask for a vape or other non-smoking way to use the cannabis?**
3. **Do they provide pre-rolled joints? This is important if you are not able to roll your own joint.**
4. **Are staff able to provide you with information about the local cannabis market?**
5. **Can you access primary care in order to try out some medications to decrease alcohol cravings, if you would like to combine this with your cannabis substitution.**
6. **What are the policies around sharing cannabis?**
7. **Are they able to provide deliveries, if that is something you need?**

A Note on Safe Tapering

- Follow the established protocols for tapering your drinking. Overall, reducing by 1 standard drink per day each week is reasonable, up to 2 standard drinks per day each week. For example, if someone is drinking 10 drinks per day, they could reduce to 8-9 drinks per day in Week 1 and to 6-7 drinks per day in Week 2.
- Slower reductions are best to minimize withdrawal symptoms and to decrease the risk of seizure. 1 standard drink is equal to a 350mL of 5% beer, 5oz of 12% wine, or 1.5oz of 40% distilled alcohol.

1. If you have a history of psychosis, anxiety, depression, or a diagnosis of schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder, cannabis could make your symptoms worse. These risks increase with more use of more potent cannabis products.
2. The risks of cannabis use vary. Talk to your health care provider about your medical history and what cannabis could do for you.