



Frequently Asked Questions about Medical Cannabis

Q: What is medical cannabis?

A: Medical cannabis, or medical marijuana, refers to using the marijuana plant or its basic extracts to treat a disease or symptom. The chemicals in marijuana that can help people medically are called cannabinoids.

Q: How are cannabinoids used as medicine?

A: The two main cannabinoids from the marijuana plant can be used to increase appetite, reduce nausea, decrease pain, inflammation (swelling and redness), treat muscle control problems, control epileptic seizures, and possibly even treat mental illness and addictions.

Q: How should I store medical cannabis?

If you use cannabis for your health, please lower the harm to yourself and others by remembering that any cannabis you get through this program is medicine for you and you only. Your medical cannabis must be stored in a safe place, out of reach from children and pets.

Q: What are the side effects of medical cannabis?

A: As with any medicine, check with your healthcare provider about taking other drugs or medications while using cannabis, to lower your risk for unsafe or unknown side effects or reactions. Medical cannabis is a strong medicine, and may change and impair you mentally and physically, so you should not drive or operate heavy machinery while under the influence of medical cannabis.

Q: Can I become addicted to medical cannabis?

A: Though most cannabis users do not become addicted to it, some people do. If you find your cannabis use is causing problems with work, relationships, school, or your overall health, let your provider know or contact a substance abuse professional.

Q: How should I use medical cannabis?

A: Think about using edible or ingestible forms of medical cannabis (e.g., cookies, lozenges, etc.) instead of smoking, in order to lower the risk to your lungs and breathing. If you do choose to smoke your medical cannabis, remember that wood, aluminum, and plastic pipes or “bongs” may release toxic fumes which can hurt you. If you use a water pipe, don’t inhale the water vapor, because it can cause lung infections. You should also make sure that any and all tools you use are cleaned and checked regularly. If you prefer to smoke, consider doing so away from children, pregnant or breast-feeding people, or people who don’t use marijuana, as the smoke may cause lung problems for others.





Q: How does Howard Brown Health decide if I have a “medical need” for cannabis?

A: Patients who wish to apply to the State’s Medical Marijuana Pilot Program must have a qualifying debilitating medical condition (as defined by Illinois Department of Public Health also known as IDPH) and be likely to benefit from using cannabis to manage that condition. Howard Brown Health’s Medical Cannabis Committee will review your request for completion of the IDPH Physician Certification Form, will consult with your health providers and medical records, and will make a decision about whether to sign off on your Physician Certification Form using evidence-based medical research and guidelines and established best practices.

Q: Will Howard Brown Health provide certification to help people cope with mood or emotional symptoms related to their qualifying debilitating medical condition?

A: Because there is a lack of medical evidence to recommend cannabis as a best treatment for mood disorders, the Medical Cannabis Committee will consider approving Physician Certifications for patients with mood symptoms for only one certification period (one year). This will allow patients to work with Howard Brown Health medical and behavioral health providers to identify and develop other coping skills and ways to manage their mood symptoms.

Q: Who is on the Medical Cannabis Committee and how will they communicate with me?

A: Howard Brown’s Medical Cannabis Committee is made up of medical and behavioral health providers and managers within the agency. Once a decision is made regarding your Physician Certification Form, you will receive a letter in the mail notifying you of the decision.

Q: What if I’m disappointed by Howard Brown Health’s decision regarding my request?

A: The decisions of Howard Brown’s Medical Cannabis Committee are final. If you are diagnosed with a new qualifying condition or have a significant change in your symptoms, you can approach your primary care provider for re-consideration. You are also free to ask other physicians outside of Howard Brown Health to request that they sign your Physician Certification Form.

For more information visit our Patient Guide to the Patient Guide to the Illinois Medical Cannabis Program at howardbrown.org/medical-cannabis.

