

Cannabis

According to the World Health Organization, cannabis is the most popular recreational drug worldwide. However, unlike many other recreational drugs, cannabis is widely used as a prescribed medicine as well. Cannabis has three main forms marijuana, hash and hash oil, and is often used for its psychoactive effects and can make people feel more relaxed.

Cannabis use can be a gateway to other drugs. Research shows most people who use illegal drugs, were first introduced to drugs like alcohol, tobacco or cannabis.

The Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association does not condone or recommend the use of recreational cannabis.

DISADVANTAGES

The biggest health risks appear in teenagers and young adults who use cannabis, as their brains are still developing. Studies have shown deterioration in learning and cognitive thinking persists into adulthood, even after stopping the use of cannabis.

Long-term use of cannabis may cause the following health effects:

- addiction
- increased risk of getting bronchitis
- lung cancer
- other diseases of the respiratory system
- decreased motivation and concentration
- memory problems and inability to learn new things

RISK FACTORS

It can be dangerous to mix cannabis with other drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, or prescription, over-the-counter, or illegal drugs. The impacts of cannabis and other drugs can produce more unpredictable harmful effects. For example, **recent use of cannabis combined with dental 'freezing' or laughing gas (nitrous oxide) can cause a life-threatening medical emergency.**



NEGATIVE HEALTH EFFECTS

Respiratory: Cannabis smoke irritates the lungs and users are likely to experience breathing problems such as coughing, excess mucus, bronchitis and worsening conditions like asthma.

Heart health: Cannabis raises heart rate for up to 3 hours after smoking which can increase the chance of heart attack, abnormal rapid heart rate, and stroke.

Mental health: Increased risk of anxiety, depression, hallucinations, paranoia, and suicidal behaviours. Cannabis can make schizophrenia worse in affected individuals.

Addiction: Contrary to popular belief, people can become addicted to cannabis. Users under the age of 18 are four to seven times more likely than adults to become addicted.

Pregnancy and breast feeding: Cannabis use during pregnancy is linked to lower birth weight and increased risk of both brain and behavioural problems in babies, and increased risk of problems with attention, memory, and problem-solving in children. THC (chemical in cannabis that causes the 'high') can be excreted in breastmilk which can affect baby's developing brain.

IMPACT ON ORAL HEALTH

Cannabis users generally have poor oral health and an increased risk of developing gingivitis (gum disease), periodontal diseases, oral cancer, oral candida (yeast) and other oral infections. Cannabis use may cause dry mouth (xerostomia) and trigger sugar cravings, increasing the risk of cavities. Similar to smoking tobacco, smoking cannabis also stains teeth.

ROLE OF THE DENTAL HYGIENIST

To ensure safe, effective dental hygiene care, dental hygienists need to know what medications clients are taking including cannabis.

- Avoid cannabis use before a dental hygiene appointment as it may increase the bleeding risk and slow healing. There may also be negative interactions with dental freezing, and other medications used during appointments.
- Dental hygienists play an important role in counselling clients on the harmful effects of cannabis products.
- See your dental hygienist for oral health advice and professional care, oral cancer screening, etc.

PREVENTION AND HOME CARE

- Drink water to stay hydrated. Avoid sugary drinks that can increase cavity risk.
- Avoid or decrease cannabis use, especially smoking cannabis.
- Use sugar-free gum/mint/candies sweetened with xylitol.
- Limit consumption of sugar-laden food, drinks and snacks.
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco.
- Brush teeth twice a day with a fluoridated toothpaste, clean between the teeth at least once per day.
- Visit a dental hygienist for regular professional cleanings, oral assessment, oral cancer screening, customized home-care program and dietary counselling.

As professional health-care providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated healthcare professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

VFS19.1
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