

# Cannabis

Cannabis is the second most commonly used substance in Canada. It is a plant known for its psychoactive properties. Various cannabis products are used for medical and nonmedical purposes due to their physical and cognitive effects. Two common ways it is consumed are inhalation (smoking or vaping) and ingestion (eating or drinking).

## NEGATIVE HEALTH EFFECTS

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 bronchitis, lung cancer, and other respiratory diseases;
- decreased motivation and concentration; and
- 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 combined 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.

## IMPACT ON ORAL HEALTH

Cannabis use can increase risk of developing gingivitis (inflammation of the gums), [periodontal \(gum\) 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 risk of bleeding and slow healing. There may also be negative interactions with dental freezing, and other medications used during appointments.
- Cannabis use before a dental hygiene appointment may impair decision-making and the capacity to provide informed consent to treatment.
- In some cases, dental hygiene appointments may need rescheduling to ensure safe delivery of dental hygiene procedures and informed consent.
- Dental hygienists play an important role in counselling clients on the harmful effects of cannabis products.
- Dental hygienists provide oral health advice, professional care, and [oral cancer screenings](#).

## PREVENTION AND HOME CARE

- Drink water to stay hydrated. Limit sugar-laden drinks, food, and snacks that can increase cavity risk.
- Avoid or decrease cannabis use, especially smoking cannabis. Avoid alcohol and tobacco use.
- Use sugar-free gum/mint/candies sweetened with xylitol.
- 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 assessments, oral cancer screenings, customized home-care programs, 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.

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