

Medical cannabis

What are cannabis and cannabis-based medicinal products?

The terms 'cannabis' and 'cannabis-based medicinal products' are used to describe either a naturally occurring or man-made substance that would usually be found in cannabis. Recent regulations (as of November 2018) have meant that cannabis-based medicinal products that could not be prescribed previously can now be legally prescribed by specialist doctors. These are only likely to benefit a very small number of patients. It remains **illegal** to possess cannabis or cannabis-based products for medical or recreational use without a prescription.

Are cannabis and cannabis-based products available on the NHS?

Currently there are few cannabis or cannabis-based products available in the UK and these are only used in specific medical conditions where there is evidence of some benefit. These include:

- Rare childhood onset epilepsies which are resistant to conventional treatments
- Nausea and vomiting caused by cancer chemotherapy which has failed to respond to conventional treatments
- Severe spasticity in Multiple Sclerosis.

NHS England is currently reviewing the safety and effectiveness of products that are available overseas in order to bring them into the UK supply chain. We are awaiting information regarding this before any new products can be used in the UK.

Are there any cannabis-based products available to buy?

There are some cannabis-based medicinal products available to buy online, however their quality and content is unknown. They may contain THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) and therefore would be illegal and unsafe for use.

There are some products such as 'CBD oil' or 'hemp oil' that are available to legally purchase from health food shops as food supplements (not available on prescription). There is no guarantee of the quality or if they have any health benefits as they tend to contain very small amounts of CBD (cannabidiol).

Is medicinal cannabis safe?

The way that medicinal cannabis works within the body is not fully understood. There are risks of using cannabis products containing THC (the chemical that gets you 'high') which are not currently clear. These medicines can affect how other medicines work, including some cancer treatments; therefore clinical trials are needed before they can be used.



Can I obtain a prescription?

As described above, cannabis and cannabis-based medicinal products are only available on the NHS for a very small number of conditions. Unless you suffer from one of the named conditions above, you are not likely to be prescribed a cannabis or cannabis-based medicinal product from your hospital consultant. Cannabis-based medicines can only be prescribed by a specialist medical doctor and are not usually prescribed by your GP. The specialist doctor will consider all the standard treatment options first, before making a decision to prescribe a cannabis-based product, if appropriate.

I already use a cannabis or cannabis-based medicinal product. Can I get more from my consultant?

If you already use a cannabis or cannabis-based medicinal product under medical supervision, please let your medical team know. If you are admitted to hospital, please ensure you bring supplies of your medical cannabis and any documentation that came with the product with you, as it is unlikely the hospital will be able to provide further supplies.

If you or your carer brings in a supply of an unlicensed cannabis medicinal product into The Royal Marsden (sourced illegally or outside of the UK), then as current practice this will need to be removed and destroyed.

Will this information be updated?

The Trust position will be continually reviewed as and when further information becomes available from National bodies such as NHS England, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and other sources.

Contact details

For further information please speak to your medical team or the pharmacy governance team via The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline.

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Further sources of information

More detailed information can be found on the following websites:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/medical-cannabis

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/complementary-therapies/complementary-therapies-explained/cannabis-oil.html

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG144

