

## Facts on Medical Marijuana (Cannabis) for Dancers

Even with limited information about its effectiveness, the use of marijuana for medical reasons is becoming more widespread around the world. Laws in the US, Canada and Europe have been progressively changing in recent years. With these changes, dancers should have a basic knowledge of what medical marijuana is, the ways it can be taken, and its effects on the human body, mind and function.

### What is Medical Marijuana?

Marijuana comes from the cannabis plant; it contains over 400 chemicals. Medical marijuana uses chemicals from the cannabis plant, or sometimes synthetically made chemicals, to treat diseases or conditions. Medical marijuana is essentially the same product as recreational marijuana but taken for medical purposes. The two main chemicals (cannabinoids) in marijuana known to effect humans are:

- **Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)** - the major psychoactive compound. This is the chemical that effects changes in the brain of the user, resulting in a “high.” Effects depend on the potency of the THC. THC is fat soluble, meaning that it enters the brain and fat stores of the body quickly
- **Cannabidiol (CBD)** - the major non-psychoactive compound; it is taken for pain without the psychoactive component or “high”

### Why do you take Medical Marijuana?

Cannabinoids affect the human central nervous system and immune system and can lead to altered moods, pain relief, and other temporary changes. Although a great deal more needs to be learned about cannabinoids, and despite mixed research results, plant based and synthetic cannabinoids have demonstrated therapeutic potential in a broad range of conditions including:

- Certain types of chronic, non-cancer pain in adults
- Chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting
- Multiple sclerosis spasticity symptoms
- Medical Marijuana does not seem to offer advantage over other pain killers for acute pain

### How do you get Medical Marijuana?

You must have a condition that qualifies for medical marijuana use (varies by state in the US) and obtain written recommendation from a licensed doctor where medical use is legal. You may also be able to obtain a medical marijuana id card (medical marijuana cards are available in the United States and Canada) which allows you to purchase your medical marijuana at a store called a dispensary. Laws and regulations all over the world are in flux and inconsistent. Talk with your doctor or prescribing physician to learn about the laws for use where you live.

### How is Medical Marijuana taken?

Several methods of use are available, and each method works differently. If you smoke or vaporize cannabis you will feel the effects almost immediately. Within minutes of inhalation, the drug is in your blood stream and transported throughout your body. The peak physiologic effects of smoking or vaporizing occur in 20-30 minutes and may last for 2-4 hours. If eaten, the effects of marijuana come on

slower over 1-2 hours and may last longer than when smoked/vaporized due to the digestive process. Ways to take medical marijuana include:

- **It can be smoked.** This is the most common route of administration; associated with respiratory problems but not lung cancer or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- **It can be inhaled through a vaporizer that turns it into a mist.** This method produces significantly less harmful byproducts compared to smoking
- **It can be ingested.** Oils and capsules are popular due to convenience. Edibles (brownies/cookies) are more difficult to dose. Prescription oromucosal (mouth) sprays are also available
- **It can be applied to the skin in a lotion, spray, oil or cream.** These are used for localized symptoms, with variable absorption and limited research on effectiveness
- **It can be placed as a few drops of liquid under that tongue.** Tinctures and lozenges have an intermediate onset with limited research on effectiveness

### **What are the general effects of Medical Marijuana?**

The general effects of medical marijuana depend on the plant variety, the goals of the treatment, and the ratio of active chemicals:

- It may be both relaxing and stimulating
- It may increase appetite and combat nausea
- It may cause an increase in heart rate, reddening of the eyes, and dryness in the mouth
- It may be used to treat the symptoms of diseases such as cancer, glaucoma, and AIDS
- It may enhance one's senses
- In larger quantities, stronger strains, or when orally consumed, the effects of cannabis may feel similar to a psychedelic drug. Users may experience mild hallucinations, anxiety, or paranoia

### **What are the effects of Medical Marijuana on physical function?**

- Impaired reaction time
- Reduced coordination and perceptual accuracy
- Impaired concentration
- Increased fatigability of the musculoskeletal system

### **What is the dosage of Marijuana?**

- Talk to your prescribing physician about the appropriate dosage for your needs. Medical marijuana should have a higher ratio dose of CBD:THC to minimize the psychoactive side-effect
- The FDA does not oversee medical marijuana like it does other prescription drugs, so the strength of the ingredients can differ quite a bit depending on where you buy it
- Smoked marijuana: Doses range depending on potency and tolerance
- Oral consumption: Doses range depending on body weight, tolerance, and metabolism

### **Be careful when using Medical Marijuana**

- Smoking anything, including marijuana, can damage the lungs, throat, and mouth
- When eating medical marijuana it may take over an hour to feel the effects. Eating more during this time can lead to a much more intense experience
- Marijuana slows down reaction time and can impair driving. Avoid driving and operating heavy machinery while under the influence of marijuana
- Some people have negative side effects and may feel uncomfortable, nauseous, or paranoid
- Marijuana is a Schedule I Drug, getting caught with it can lead to serious consequences, including jail time in the US. Even in states where marijuana is now legal, US federal law can still be used to prosecute those who use, buy, sell or grow marijuana.

**Be mindful!** Always consult your doctor before beginning any new medication. If you choose to use medical marijuana, talk with your prescribing physician to understand the best way to maximize the benefits and reduce the risks and side effects.

**Additional Resources:**

<https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/medical-marijuana-faq>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana-medicine>

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/marijuana>

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/320984.php>

**Disclaimer:**

The information on medical marijuana contained in this paper is intended to help inform the dancer on basic facts about medical marijuana. It is not meant to take the place of the advice of a medical professional. This information is provided by Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health.

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