

Cannabinoids

To relieve pain



Your doctor has prescribed a cannabinoid. It is used to treat chronic pain. Cannabinoids act on some of the body's natural receptors to relieve pain.

How is this medication taken?

If you take it as a capsule to swallow (nabilone or Cesamet):

- Generally, it should be taken 1 to 3 times a day, as recommended by your doctor.

If you take it in spray form (Sativex):

- **The spray should be aimed at the underside of the tongue or the inside of the cheeks.** Don't aim it at the throat, as this can be irritating. You also shouldn't spray it into your nose.
- The maximum dosage for the first day is 2 sprays at least 4 hours apart. You then increase the medication as recommended by your doctor. It's important to respect the prescribed doses.
- Don't use the spray if you have any mouth sores.

Patients who receive a cannabinoid prescription commit to a therapeutic contract. **Here are the rules to follow:**

- > respect the prescribed doses
- > get your prescription from only one doctor
- > buy all your medications from the same pharmacy (of your choice)

How long will this treatment go on?

Cannabinoids are used to relieve persistent pain. The treatment can go on for months or years. Cannabinoids are taken alone or in combination with other drugs.

Never stop taking your medication from one day to the next, as you could experience withdrawal symptoms (tremors, anxiety, trouble sleeping, etc.). Talk with your doctor about it first.



What are the side effects?

Like all drugs, cannabinoids can cause side effects. You may experience **any of the following**:

- diarrhea
- dizziness
- drowsiness (wanting to sleep)
- confusion or disorientation
- attention or memory problems
- hallucinations or strange ideas
- weakness or fatigue
- rapid heartbeats
- changes in appetite



These side effects usually disappear over time. If they don't, talk to your pharmacist or doctor. Your dose may need to be decreased.

Tell your doctor if you have ever had or currently have the following health problems:

- heart condition
- psychiatric disorders

Cannabinoids can make these worse.

Could I become addicted to cannabinoids?

Like marijuana, cannabinoids in tablets or oral sprays can cause physical and psychological dependence. If you want to stop taking the drug, first talk to your doctor, who will tell you how to do it safely.

What is the difference between physical dependence and psychological dependence?

- > **Physical dependence:** If you stop taking the medication abruptly, you may become irritable or have trouble sleeping. These signs of withdrawal can be controlled by slowly reducing doses. Your doctor will adjust the medication as needed.
- > **Psychological dependence:** If you feel you're taking it for any reason other than pain (such as to increase the feeling of well-being and pleasure), it is very important to talk to your doctor.

If you have ever had a problem with overuse (regardless of the substance, including alcohol), report it to your doctor. He or she will be better able to help you and ensure the treatment is safe for you.

Can I drink alcohol during the treatment?

Alcohol can intensify the effects of the treatment on the brain. That's why it's advisable to avoid or limit the intake of alcohol (and drinks containing it) when you're under the influence of cannabinoids. **But be careful:** don't suddenly stop this treatment because you intend to drink alcohol (for example, during a night out).

Can I drive and do manual labour during the treatment?

Cannabinoids can cause drowsiness. You could have trouble driving a car or using certain tools.

Before driving again or using dangerous tools, make sure you're functional and fully awake.





Can I take cannabinoids while pregnant or breastfeeding?

Cannabinoids - just like cannabis - are not recommended during pregnancy. They have an impact on the development of the unborn child. If you're pregnant or breastfeeding, or planning a pregnancy, talk to your doctor about it.

Do I need to follow any special diet during the treatment?

No.

What happens if I take other medications or natural products?

Some drugs or natural products can change the effect of cannabinoids. For example, any drug that causes drowsiness may increase the tranquilizing effect of cannabinoids.

It's always best to talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking other products. He or she will make sure to avoid interactions, either by changing the time you take your medication or by offering you another product.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

Take it as soon as possible. However, if it's almost time for the next dose, wait until the usual time.

Don't double the dose.

Where should I store my medication?

The Sativex vaporizer should be kept refrigerated until opened. Place the vial in an upright position. Once opened, write the date of opening on the bottle and keep it at room temperature.

Cesamet capsules can be stored at room temperature. However, don't store them in the kitchen or bathroom. Medications are sensitive to heat and humidity.

Remember that all medications should be stored in a safe place, away from children.

What should I do in case of an emergency or overdose?

Important: Go to the emergency room.

For Immediate assistance, call **9-1-1**.



REMEMBER

You can manage your pain!

How? By doing:

- light activities
- progressive exercises
- relaxation techniques
- your favourite hobbies and pastimes



Eat well to maintain a healthy weight. Sleep enough to feel rested. Take your medications as prescribed.



For your health and that of your loved ones, never take someone else's medicine and never share yours.

Who should I contact for help or to ask questions?

If you have questions about the medication, ask your pharmacist or nurse. Otherwise, ask your doctor at your next appointment.



RESSOURCES UTILES

Québec Association of Chronic Pain:
> douleurchronique.org

Canadian Pain Society:
> canadianpainsociety.ca

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante



NOTEPAD



Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.



The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
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