IS CANNABIS A SAFE MEDICATION?
Cannabis is a remarkably safe medication. In fact, there have been no documented deaths attributed to its use. Particularly when compared with other prescription medications, it is clear that cannabis is one of the safest medications available.

ARE THERE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH USING CANNABIS?
Although the risks involved in using medicinal cannabis are minimal when compared to other prescription medications, as with anything you put in your body there are factors that need to be taken into consideration.

- **Anxiety**
  Certain strains of cannabis might increase anxiety in a patient who already experiences anxiety. Careful selection of the proper strain can avoid this.

- **Depression**
  There are also certain strains that are not recommended for patients suffering from depression or sadness due to their tendency to physiologically relax the body. Again, inquiring about the effect of certain strains can prevent this from becoming an issue.

- **Addiction and Dependence**
  When compared to many prescription medications, the addiction potential for cannabis is minimal. In fact, a study by the National Institute On Drug Abuse found cannabis to be the least addictive substance when ranked with caffeine, cocaine, alcohol, heroin, and nicotine.

  Cannabis dependence has been shown to occur amongst heavy users. Heavy use can lead to increased tolerance and withdrawal symptoms upon stopping use. However, for most medical cannabis patients using between 1 – 2 grams per day, there has been no reported addiction or withdrawal.

- **Abuse**
  It is important to be aware of when the medicinal use of cannabis turns into a habit, and use becomes more frequent. Abuse of cannabis can lead to increased tolerance, dependence, and withdrawal. If CVD suspects that a patient might be abusing cannabis or another substance, it is not required to continue to furnish the product. If you experience any of the following signs, or suspect that you have a problem, you should seek professional assistance. CVD can provide you with a referral if necessary.

  - Increased tolerance – a need for markedly more amounts of the substance to achieve the desired effect.
  - Withdrawal – upon stopping, experiencing insomnia, cravings, restlessness, loss of appetite, sweating, mood swings, depression, irritability.
  - A persistent desire to control substance use, but failing to do so.
Social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of use of the substance.

Continued use of substance, despite knowledge of problems caused by it.

**HOW DOES CANNABIS WORK?**

Medical cannabis contains over 400 natural compounds, 80 of which are only found in cannabis. These unique compounds are called cannabinoids. Cannabinoids provide symptom relief by attaching to receptors in the brain that look for similar compounds that occur naturally in the human body, such as dopamine. There are five major cannabinoids that are particularly effective in their own unique ways:

**THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol)**

THC acts as a muscle relaxant and anti-inflammatory and as a psychological stimulant. A cannabis strain high in THC is a good choice for a patient who wishes to remain alert and active. THC in medical cannabis acts in the following ways:

- anti-epileptic
- anti-inflammatory
- anti-depressant
- appetite stimulant
- reducing blood pressure

**CBD (cannabidiol)**

CBD tends to reduce the psychological effects of medical cannabis. A strain that has high THC and high CBD will have fewer “mental” effects and more physical ones. High CBD strains are especially effective for illnesses with strong physical symptoms. CBDs effects include:

1. reduced pain
2. reduced anxiety
3. reduced nausea
4. sedative effects
5. anti-convulsive
6. anti-schizophrenic

**CBN (cannabinol)**

CBN is cannabinol, not to be confused with cannabidiol (CBD). CBN is very similar to THC, but has fewer psychological effects. It is produced as THC breaks down within the medical cannabis plant. High THC will make CBN’s effects stronger, and very high CBN concentrations can produce undesirably strong head highs. A strain with high CBN levels can be particularly helpful for:

7. lowering pressure in the eye (such as with glaucoma)
8. analgesic
9. anti-seizure
**CBC (cannabichromene)**

CBC stands for cannabichromene. CBC tends to enhance the effects of THC. High CBC levels will increase the potency of a high-THC medical cannabis strain. **CBC** working together with THC is known to be a:

10. sedative
11. analgesic
12. anti-inflammatory

**CBG (cannabigerol)**

CBG stands for cannabigerol. CBG has no psychological effects on its own and is not usually found in high amounts in most medical cannabis. Scientists believe that cannabigerol is actually one of the oldest forms of cannabinoids, meaning it is essentially a “parent” to the other cannabinoids found in medical cannabis. It also has anti-microbial properties. CBG has physical effects such as:

13. lowering pressure in the eye
14. anti-inflammatory
15. sedative
16. sleep assistance

These five major cannabinoids are as most effective when they work together. Professional medical cannabis growers can analyze their strains to breed and grow medication for patients with the desired range of levels of each major cannabinoid. With an understanding of what each compound does, medical cannabis pharmacists can find the right combination for patients to treat specific conditions and find maximum relief.

**WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT STRAINS OF CANNABIS?**

Cannabis has two primary strains, Indica and Sativa. All of the products available in the dispensary are hybrids or combinations of the two. Additionally, each strain will differ in the amounts of THC, CBD, CBN, CBC, and CBG. The levels of these compounds present in a particular strain will determine its medicinal effects. To assist in keeping track of a particular strain’s effect, CVD can provide a tracking sheet to help you maintain a record of strains used and their particular effects.

**INDICA**

The medicating effect of the cannabis Indica tends to promote relaxation, stress relief, and overall body pain relief. Indica is also used in the treatment of insomnia. Patients who suffer from high blood pressure may find that it is lowered when using Indica. Many patients choose Indica as a late night medication.
SATIVA
The cannabis Sativa provides a medicating effect of energy, mood-enhancement, optimism, and pain relief for certain symptoms. These effects make it a good choice for daytime medication.

INDICA-SATIVA HYBRID
Although this hybrid strain contains qualities of both strains, the medicinal effects of Indica are dominant. In this way, it will provide the medicating effects of Indica (relaxation of the body and mind, pain relief, sleep aid), while retaining some Sativa qualities. Since each hybrid is different in proportion of Indica and Sativa, patients should inquire as to the particular hybrid's effects.

SATIVA-INDICA HYBRID
This is a Sativa dominant hybrid, tending toward the medicating effects of Sativa (energy, mood enhancement, pain relief, etc.), but will have some Indica qualities as well. Again, with the many varieties of hybrids available, the effects are dependent on the particular strain. Inquire as to a particular hybrid's medicinal effects when choosing.

HOW DO I TAKE CANNABIS?
There are a number of methods to consume medical cannabis. They include:

Smoking
Smoking is the most expedient method of consumption, with almost immediate effect and dosage controlled by the patient. However, it can damage the lungs and cause respiratory problems. Although not nearly as harmful as cigarettes, some researchers believe that cannabis contains toxins and carcinogens that lead to increased risk of respiratory diseases and cancer. Therefore, smoking is not recommended as the first choice for medical cannabis consumption.

If you do choose to smoke, here are some helpful tips to minimize the risk due to toxins and tars contained in the cannabis:

17. Use a more potent, high THC cannabis so that less inhalation is required to achieve an effective dose.
18. Using a pipe allows a more consistent and predictable dosage.
19. Use a filter with non-chemical rolling paper if smoking a cannabis cigarette (joint).
20. Exhale immediately after inhaling deeply to avoid the tars in the cannabis from coating your lungs. It is a falsehood that holding your breath will enable more THC to be absorbed.
**Vaporizing**

Use of a cannabis vaporizer is the most recommended method as an alternative to smoking. A vaporizer is a device that gently heats up cannabis with digital accuracy at a lower temperature than burning it. This in turn releases the active medicinal components of cannabis, such as THC, while producing fewer harmful byproducts. Inhalation of the vapor offers the same therapeutic benefits of smoking but without exposure to harmful toxins. Furthermore, the vapor is cooler in temperature than smoke, making it less damaging and painful to throat and lung tissue.

**Edibles**

Edibles are food treats that contain cannabis infused butter or cooking oil and often come in the form of cookies, brownies, or candies. If made from cannabis leaf and bud, they often have a distinct taste and green tinge from the plant's chlorophyll. Edibles made from concentrates like hash oil often have a less noticeable taste and color.

The effects of consumed cannabis are much different compared to smoking or vaporizing. Edibles are slower to take effect, slower to wear off and usually offer a different effect than that of smoking or vaporizing. Edibles are introduced through the gastrointestinal tract and processed by the liver before entering the bloodstream. In turn, the liver alters the THC into the more potent 11-hydroxy-THC, rendering a stronger, more sedative effect. This can be particularly beneficial for those with chronic severe body pain or sleep issues.

It is important to note that, unlike with smoking and vaporizing, it is much easier to over-consume and therefore over-medicate through ingesting edibles. Because the medicinal effect is delayed or because the edibles taste good, patients are cautioned to begin with a small amount and wait an hour or two before ingesting more. It is imperative that extra consumption does not exceed recommended dosage.

Additionally, it's necessary to understand that eating raw cannabis does not deliver therapeutic benefits and is not recommended.

Cannabis edibles are particularly helpful in relieving pain, spasticity and sleep disorders, but are, for obvious reasons, not the best method if experiencing nausea or vomiting. The dispensary can help you choose an edible and dose best suited for your needs.
**Cannabis Tinctures and Tonics**

Cannabis can also be made into tinctures and tonics, which are then added to food and liquids, applied on the skin, or consumed directly in small amounts or by placing drops under the tongue. Patients experiencing nausea and vomiting may find this the best method for cannabis consumption. Tinctures and tonics are made by soaking cannabis flowered tops and leaves in alcohol. The solids are then strained, leaving a liquid containing the cannabinoids that produce the needed medical relief. Typical dosage of cannabis tinctures is between 3 drops to no more than 2 full droppers. As with the edibles, it is best to start slow and use only a small portion until symptom relief is achieved.

**Cannabis Tea**

Cannabis leaves, stems, and buds can also be used to make a medicinal tea. As with other herb teas, pour boiled water over the leaves and stems in a small pot or cup and let steep for at least half an hour. As with cannabis edibles and tinctures, adding alcohol, oil or butter is necessary to help dissolve the THC, which is only slightly soluble in boiling water. Recipes often use milk, spices, and sometimes hard liquor to make a spiced chai-type tea.

Cannabis tea can vary in strength, depending on the types and amounts of ingredients used. Teas have been described by patients to range from being similar to drinking chamomile tea to delivering a medicinal effect that lasts for hours. It is best to start with an amount equivalent to a cannabis cigarette for each cup. However, experimenting with different recipes and quantities will help determine the amount needed to deliver the therapeutic effect desired.