



Speaking to your Doctor about Medicinal Cannabis

Are you wondering about approaching your doctor to discuss using medical cannabis to treat the symptoms of your disease or condition? If they don't already know about it, they should be aware of the therapies you are using to manage living with your disease and/or condition.

One of the biggest hurdles for patients seeking legal access to Health Canada's Medical Marijuana Access Program can be finding a physician who will support their application, a task that more often than not is extra difficult for category 2 patients. This guide will help prepare you for your visit with your doctor.

During the visit you are there to talk about your health. Your doctor should take you seriously. If you feel you have not been provided good service then ask for a second opinion. The Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics #26: Respect your patient's reasonable request for a second opinion from a physician of the patient's choice.

As a patient you do not necessarily have to try other drugs before requesting to use cannabis as medicine. For example, if the risks outweigh the benefits of a medication being suggested then a patient can refuse to use that drug. Some physicians may not be aware of this, as when the Medical Marijuana Access Program began, cannabis was considered to be a last resort treatment.

A GP can sign for both category 1 and category 2 patients. Some think a specialist is required for category 2 but a GP can sign following the rules found on Health Canada B-2 Medical Practitioner's Form. Your Doctor MAY charge to have the Health Canada forms filled out but ethically the cost should not be disproportionate to other forms.

Points for consideration

- 1 Be prepared for your appointment. Doctors generally do not have much information about cannabis use for medicinal purposes as it is not an approved drug. By using the word cannabis (the scientific name), you are helping to remove some of the possible associated stigmatization. You may find role playing or writing down what to say beforehand helpful.
- 2 Speak up. You may be concerned about your doctor's potential reaction to your request to use cannabis as medicine. Remember that your doctor is there to work with you to help make the best decisions regarding your health. They may have negative attitudes toward cannabis use in general, but if you are prepared to explain how cannabis helps you, it may increase your chance of receiving the needed support. Remember how you relate to your physician can directly affect your care.
- 3 IF you are nervous about discussing using cannabis as medicine with your physician, bring someone with you for moral support to your appointment. Depending on your physical location, MUMM have patient advocacy volunteers who are willing to accompany you. You can contact us at: - patientadvocate@mumm.ca

Bring in Health Canada's Medical Practitioner's Form B1 or B2 for your doctor to fill out, and ONLY this form. If you bring in all of the forms that you need to complete your application your doctor will not have time to sort through them to determine his role in your application.

- Bring in the two copies of your passport type photographs for your doctor to sign, as required by the MMAR. You MUST have the same physician sign the back of your photograph and you application.
 - Bring the Canadian Medical Practitioners Association "Release from liability form". This is not a Health Canada requirement, but some doctors have their concerns eased when you sign this form. Please note, this form is not a Health Canada requirement (your doctor keeps it in your file), but it may ease concerns your doctor may have regarding legal issues.
 - Clearly identify the symptoms you feel you can better manage with cannabis. How does your condition affect you? If you have more than one symptom, list them all. Document what you're feeling as you're feeling it so you can give detailed information on exactly how you are affected. Describe your symptoms as accurately as possible.
 - Explain how you are using cannabis (or want to use cannabis) to manage your symptoms. Your doctor will want to discuss what effect cannabis has or will have on your symptoms and well-being. Tell them how much cannabis in grams per day you require and how often you consume cannabis. Tell your doctor whether you are smoking it, eating it, or using it in some other form. Many doctors prefer that their patients chose methods other than smoking to consume cannabis as physicians generally are leery about using smoke as a method of medication delivery. Be prepared to speak to your doctor about alternative modes of ingestion and it may sway their opinion on your medical cannabis need.
- 4 If you have never used cannabis before, get informed. Speak to others who do use it to manage their symptoms, or contact MUMM's Patient Advocacy Committee for more information on ingestion methods and dosage. Bring credible information for your physician. Newspaper articles and stories can be easily dismissed by health care professionals. Recognized medical/scientific journals such as the Canadian Medical Association Journal and Health Canada's information for health care professionals are good sources that will be taken more seriously.
- 5 Make a list of medicines and therapies you have tried for these symptoms, and identify which has worked and which has not worked. Document what relieves your symptoms (exercise, medications, meditation, etc) and how it benefits you. Does cannabis improve your quality of life? Are you able to work because of your cannabis consumption?

If you require the forms for Health Canada's Medical Marijuana Access Program, the CMPA's "Release from Liability form" or further information for your physician, please contact Maritimers Unite for Medical Marijuana Society. patientadvocate@mumm.ca ; MUMM, PO Box 362, Bridgetown, NS. B0S 1C0.

Now you are ready for your Doctor's visit.

Remember cannabis is medicine - if you treat it that way then your Doctor's visit may go a lot better.