



# Cannabis and HIV/AIDS:

## 3. How to Speak to your Doctor about Medicinal Cannabis

Included in this series of fact sheets on Cannabis and HIV/AIDS:

1. The Medicinal Use of Cannabis
2. How to Apply to Use Medicinal Cannabis Legally
3. How to Speak to your Doctor about Medicinal Cannabis
4. Information Sheet for Physicians
5. Where to Find Cannabis for Medicinal Purposes
6. A Few Tips for Safer Use and Better Health
7. Cooking with Cannabis
8. Tips for Growing Cannabis Safely
9. How to Deal with the Stigma and Discrimination of Cannabis Use

### Contact Information:

These fact sheets have been prepared by the Canadian AIDS Society, in consultation with a National Steering Committee and a Legal Consultant. They are easily photocopied. We encourage you to distribute them widely.

For updates on these fact sheets, or for more information, please visit our web site at <[www.cdnaids.ca/cannabis](http://www.cdnaids.ca/cannabis)> or contact us at:

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### How to Approach Your Doctor about the Medicinal Use of Cannabis

You may have already discussed your use of cannabis for medicinal purposes with your doctor, or you may be hesitant to do so for a variety of reasons. It is a good idea for all your health care practitioners to be aware of the therapies you are using to manage living with HIV and AIDS. Your relationship with your doctor, and how well you talk with each other, affects your care.

- **Be prepared for your appointment.** Doctors may not have much information about cannabis use for medicinal purposes as it is not an approved drug. See below on how to prepare for your appointment.
- **Speak up.** You will need to raise the issue with your doctor. If you are concerned about your doctor's reaction, remember that doctors are there to work with you to help make the best decisions about your health.

They may have negative attitudes toward cannabis use in general, but if you are prepared to explain how it helps you, they will most likely be understanding. Luckily, many doctors who treat people living with HIV/AIDS are familiar with the use of cannabis for managing symptoms.

- **Bring someone with you for moral support** if you are nervous and want to make sure you can bring up the subject of cannabis with your doctor.

### Legal Access – Your Doctor's Role

In order for you to have legal access to cannabis for medicinal purposes in Canada, you must apply for an Authorization to Possess cannabis, according to the *Marihuana Medical Access Regulations (MMAR)*.

Please refer to the fact sheet on "How to Apply to Use Medicinal Cannabis Legally" on how to get the application form. Your doctor will need to fill out Form B1 as part of

your application. You will therefore need to make an appointment with your doctor before you can send in your application for consideration.

# How to Prepare Before Your Appointment

It is a good idea to do your homework before your appointment with your doctor. Here are some things to consider:

- **Bring in the B1 Form for your doctor to fill out, and ONLY this form.** If you bring in the whole stack of forms for the MMAR, your doctor will not likely have time to sift through them all to determine which one to complete.
- **Bring in the two copies of your passport photographs for your doctor to sign,** as required by the MMAR. Please refer to the fact sheet on “How to Apply to Use Medicinal Cannabis Legally” for more information.
- **Clearly identify the symptoms you feel you can better manage with cannabis.** For people living with HIV/AIDS, the symptoms included in the MMAR are: severe pain, wasting, appetite loss, weight loss and severe nausea.
- **Explain how you are using cannabis (or want to use cannabis) to manage your symptoms.** Your doctor will want to understand how you are using or plan on using cannabis and what effect this is having or will have on your symptoms and well-being. Tell your doctor whether you are smoking it, eating it, or using it in some other form, how much and how often you are using cannabis. Be prepared to explain how cannabis is relieving your symptoms and to say how much cannabis you use, in grams per day. If you have never used cannabis before, get informed. Speak to others who do use it to manage their symptoms.
- **Make a list of medicines and therapies you have tried for these symptoms,** and identify which has worked and which has not worked.
- **Present your doctor with the fact sheet on “Information for Physicians”,** from this series.
- **Consider signing the “Release Form for Medical Practitioner” from the Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA).** The CMPA is the medical professional’s insurer and signing this form may alleviate some of your doctor’s concerns about liability. **Note:** This form is not valid in Quebec. The form is available on the CMPA’s web site at <www.cmpa-acpm.ca> (just “search” for “Release Form for Medical Practitioners”). This is NOT a Health Canada form and is NOT required to obtain an authorization to possess cannabis. It may however be useful in getting your physician to support your application.

## Useful Resources:

- **Health Canada – Medical Use of Marijuana:** <www.healthcanada.gc.ca/mma>
- **Medical cannabis program information:** <www.medicalmarihuana.ca>
- **Medical Marijuana Information Resource Centre:** <www.medicalmarijuanainformation.com>



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