

From the Cabinet or the Street?

How is Medical Marijuana Different from the Street Drug

Marijuana smoking has been used historically in many cultures for medical purposes. Canada was the first country to create a system for regulating the use of medical marijuana in 2001, and it is currently available for a variety of different health reasons. Smoking medical marijuana is generally thought to help relieve nausea and vomiting, and is helpful in assisting people to regain their appetite. This is most helpful for individuals suffering from AIDS/HIV and cancer. It is also thought that medical marijuana may help to reduce pain and muscle spasms.

Medical marijuana is available in several different forms. It can be smoked as marijuana cigarettes or it can be ingested in a pill form. The pill form is known as dronabinol or nabilone. It is a synthetic version of the chemical THC, which is the main chemical in cannabis or marijuana. Choosing the pill form offers an individual the opportunity to use marijuana without the health risks that come with smoking.

Health Canada has identified specific criteria for individuals who are eligible to apply for possession of medical marijuana. Individuals allowed to apply for medical marijuana are people being treated for symptoms within the context of providing end-of-life care. Individuals with severe pain and muscle spasms associated with multiple sclerosis and spinal cord injury or disease are eligible to apply for medical marijuana. In addition, people suffering from severe pain, anorexia, weight loss and nausea from cancer or HIV/AIDS, seizures from epilepsy or severe pain from arthritis are all eligible to apply for possession of medical marijuana. Individuals with any other medical conditions must be able to prove that other treatments have not worked and that those treatments failed to relieve their symptoms.

Marijuana that is used legitimately for medical purposes differs greatly from that which someone might buy on the street. One major difference between the two is where the actual drug comes from. When someone legally purchases medical marijuana, they can be assured that the quality of the marijuana is consistent, because it is coming from a company in which the production is standardized and the quality is controlled by Health Canada. When someone buys marijuana illegally on the street, they do not know where it originated, or if the quality is consistent from one batch to the next. As well, when buying marijuana on the street, there is a risk that it could be laced with other drugs such as PCP, or even cut with other products such as herbs or vegetation.

Another difference between medical marijuana and street marijuana is the outcome that the user is pursuing. People using marijuana for its medical purpose are generally not after achieving the drug's psychoactive effects. People using it for a medical purpose are trying to modify particular symptoms and generally use marijuana that is milder than recreational users. In contrast, recreational users take the drug to achieve an altered state of consciousness and perception, and generally use marijuana that is stronger and more potent.

Although medical marijuana is available for eligible, seriously ill people, it is still an illegal substance and has negative side-effects just like the marijuana available on the street. However, in the case of some terminally ill patients, the short-term benefits may outweigh the long-term effects. Research is still being conducted to provide information about whether medical marijuana is effective and appropriate in relieving symptoms of cancer and other health conditions. As well, research is still being conducted which form is the most effective way to prescribe marijuana to achieve the desired effects.