



Medical Cannabis (MC) Use May 7, 2022

by Phil Roach, member, Peripheral Neuropathy Support Network

1. To smoke, or not to smoke.

Disclaimer: Consuming Medical Cannabis (MC) is not going to be to everyone's liking. MC is not a "Silver Bullet" that will relief all PN symptoms.

- a. MC should be used as part of an overall PN treatment program, used in consultation with your physician.
- b. Decision criteria
 - i. Safer alternative to opioids
 - ii. More effective pain relief
 - iii. More expensive
 - iv. Legal issues traveling out-of-state
 - v. Societal Issues
- c. Benefits
 - i. Can purchase as much as MC you want/need
 - ii. Faster pain relief, usually within seconds
 - iii. More complete pain relief (alleviates most pain sensations, but likely not numbness)
 - iv. Can use whenever needed
 - v. Virtually impossible to overdose

- vi. Non-addictive
- vii. Organic alternative to opioids
- viii. Quality control and product testing is strictly regulated in Virginia
- ix. Several different ways to consume MC (smoke, vape, edibles)
- x. Many different strains or ingredients, some designed/used specifically for PN
- xi. Can be delivered to your home, in some cases

d. Detractors

- i. Cannot legally travel across state borders while in possession of MC. This applies even if use is legal in your state and legal in the other state to which you are traveling.

NOTE: Be sure to check your local laws and guidelines for MC use in your area. Laws are changing all the time as MC use continues to increase.

- ii. Please do not attempt to board a public plane, train, bus, or other conveyance while in possession of MC.

NOTE: Leave the car parked! Do not drive or use dangerous machinery while under the influence of MC!

- iii. Social Stigma – Think of the movie, “Reefer Madness”

- iv. Medical doctor stigma (doctor dependent)

1. My experience has been that most PCPs are unfamiliar with MC, but are OK with its use, so long as it is providing a medical benefit.

2. I have not found a Pain Management doctor that will also treat you with opioids if you are using MC.

- v. It can be inconvenient or difficult sometimes to consume MC, depending on your location. I urge you to remain safely at home while using MC until you become familiar with its effects. Check local laws for MC consumption!

2. Considerations for choosing to use Medical Cannabis (MC)

- a. Most likely will be unable to be prescribed long-term pain medication (opioids) by your current pain management doctor.
- b. Will need a plan to get weaned off opioids
 - i. Weaning off opioids can be emotionally, physically, and mentally challenging.
 - ii. Withdrawal symptoms can last several months.
 - iii. Have your doctor provide you a “step-down” dose of your current pain meds to get weaned off them. Discuss withdrawal with your pain management doctor or PCP.
- c. Need to plan your day around MC use (avoid driving after consuming MC). I try to wait as long as possible in the day before using MC.
- d. Cost can be prohibitive
 - i. Look for sales at your local MC outlet.

3. To obtain an MC Card

- a. Registration is a three-part process:
 - i. Receive an authorization form from a State-approved physician.
 - ii. Receive a Medical Cannabis License from the state.
 - iii. Register with a State-approved MC Dispensary.
- b. Find a reputable MC physician to review your case.
 - i. On-line search for “Virginia Medical Marijuana Card” for a list of accredited physicians.
 - ii. Obtain documentation of your PN diagnosis from your current doctor indicating your condition and its severity.
 - iii. Pay \$150 fee to screening physician to make an appointment. Credit cards are accepted.
 - iv. Forward your PN medical history to the doctor.

- v. The doctor will schedule a telemed interview.
 - vi. During the telemed process, the screening doctor will ask several questions about your overall health and impact of your PN.
 - vii. When approved, your doctor will email you their Approval Certification form. You need this form first, before registering with the state.
- c. To register with your state/commonwealth:
- i. In Virginia, go to: <https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/pharmacy/PharmaceuticalProcessing/docs/HowToPatientRegistration.pdf>
 - ii. In Maryland, go to: https://mmcc.maryland.gov/Pages/process_to_obtain.aspx
 - iii. In D.C., go to: <https://abra.dc.gov/page/medical-cannabis-patients>
 - iv. These sites provide detailed instructions for MC registration.
 - v. Forward them your MC doctor's approved use form.
 - vi. Fill out on-line application and pay annual fee (\$50 in VA). Go to: <https://www.license.dhp.virginia.gov/apply/>
 - vii. Select Registered Patient for the use of Medical Cannabis Oil. (Oil reference now includes all forms of Medical Cannabis.)
 - viii. Send approved application to your state's appropriate agency
 - ix. Wait for card to show up in the mail.

NOTE: Virginia is in the process of making MC licenses available via email. Please check the latest instructions from Commonwealth of Virginia to verify delivery method.

- x. Please note that, in all States, all MC sales are CASH ONLY, due to current Federal Gov't regulation.
- xi. Locate MC outlets near you. There are five "Zones", each served by a different MC dispensary. You can register and use the dispensary of your choice.

NOTE: Currently, there is no dispensary located in Zone1.

4. Once you have your card

- a. Make an appointment with your local MC Dispensary to consult with an advisor. Tell them the medical condition that you want to treat.
- b. Ask about strains that are effective in relieving PN pain.
- c. When visiting the MC dispensary, you MUST bring your MC doctor's certification, your VA MC License, and a state photo ID (as proof of residence).

5. Personal Experience

- a. My advisor provided me the following ingredients to look for in MC products that have proven to provide PN pain relief:
 - i. THC-V (and variants, THC-VA, THC-VB, etc.) found in
 1. Daddy Cakes
 2. Sour Banana
 - ii. Limonene
 - iii. Myrcene
 1. Limonene and myrcene are terpenes (a chemical component of MC), typically found together in the same strain of cannabis. They are effective in relieving PN pain, even in the absence of THC-V.
 2. Martian Monkey cannabis strain is the best pain reliever that I have found. Very little THC (does not produce a profound "high". It has a good dose of CBD, which is known for its anti-inflammatory properties.
- b. More work is being put into developing specific strains of MC to provide relief for specific conditions.
- c. Again, discuss your desired MC use with a licensed MC counsellor to obtain the best product for the desired result.

6. Resources for Additional Information:

- a. FDA: <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/public-health-focus/fda-and-cannabis-research-and-drug-approval-process>
- b. NIH: <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/cannabis-marijuana-and-cannabinoids-what-you-need-to-know>
- c. Drexel University, (Pennsylvania) Study: <https://drexel.edu/cannabis-research/>
- d. Harvard University: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/medical-marijuana-2018011513085>
- e. NORML: <https://norml.org/marijuana/library/recent-medical-marijuana-research/>

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