

MEDICAL CANNABIS AND EPILEPSY

FACT SHEET



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Living with epilepsy can be challenging – especially when seizures don't respond to standard treatments.



This treatment gap has led people to seek other forms of therapy, including medicinal cannabis. Medical cannabis isn't a cure, and it's not right for everyone - but for some families, it may offer hope and improved seizure control

What is medical cannabis?

Medical cannabis is derived from the cannabis plant. It contains active chemicals called cannabinoids:

- CBD (cannabidiol): does not cause a "high," often used for epilepsy.
- THC (tetrahydrocannabinol): can cause a "high," less commonly used for epilepsy.

Medical cannabis is produced under strict conditions to ensure quality and safety.

It is different from recreational cannabis, which remains illegal in Australia.

Why is it used for epilepsy?

CBD-based medical cannabis may reduce seizures in certain severe epilepsy syndromes, particularly:

- Dravet syndrome
- Lennox-Gastaut syndrome
- Tuberous Sclerosis Complex

It is usually prescribed in addition to anti-seizure medicines, not as a replacement.

What do we know so far?

In people with drug resistant epilepsy, where several anti-seizure medications have not worked - CBD has sometimes been added to existing treatments.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has found that the strongest evidence for using medical cannabis in epilepsy relates to children and young adults with drug-resistant epilepsy. In these cases, CBD products have helped reduce seizure frequency by 50% or more in up to half of paediatric patients.

Some studies also suggest that CBD may improve quality of life for both children and adults with epilepsy noting positive effects on sleep, behavior, and alertness.

Benefits vary: some people see major improvements, others only small changes.

CBD side effects may include:

- Drowsiness
- Diarrhea, vomiting, decreased appetite
- Changes in mood

*Long-term effects are still being studied

*CBD may interact with other medications – speak to your doctor about this.

If you are thinking of trying medical cannabis it is very important that you first speak to your neurologist or treating doctor.



MEDICAL CANNABIS ACCESS IN AUSTRALIA

Who can access it in Australia?

Medical cannabis is legal but only available on prescription from a doctor. Doctors must apply through the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) Special Access Scheme or become an Authorised Prescriber.

Access is usually considered when:

- Standard epilepsy treatments have not worked.
- The person has a severe epilepsy syndrome.

Families should discuss options with their neurologist or GP.

Read more about [Accessing Medical Cannabis](#)

Start with your doctor: Never begin any cannabis products without medical advice.

Be cautious with online products: over-the-counter or internet cannabis oils are not regulated and may be unsafe.

Questions to ask your doctor

- Is medical cannabis suitable for my/my child's type of epilepsy?
- What kind of product would be prescribed (CBD-only or CBD+THC)?
- How will it interact with current anti-seizure medications?
- What side effects should we watch for?
- How will we monitor progress and adjust the dose?
- What are the costs and how often will we need to refill?
- What happens if it doesn't work or causes problems?

**For more, visit our
website**



Contact us on:

Phone: 1300 37 45 37

Email: epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au

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Disclaimer: This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice, and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.