

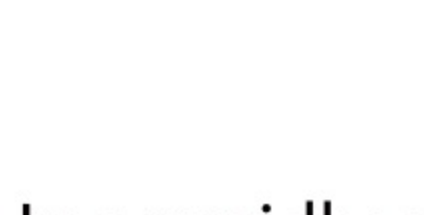


Cannabis 101

How To Use Cannabis Oil

Each way of consuming cannabis oil has its own particular benefits and effects.

By **Lauren Wilson** · Nov 29, 2018



In a rapidly changing medical and adult-use landscape, there are far more options for cannabis consumption than ever before. Aside from OG flower options there are concentrates, edibles, transdermal patches, topicals, oils and tinctures. Each mode of consumption has its own particular benefits and effects, but more and more people are seeking out cannabis oils for their ease of use and convenience.



What is cannabis oil?

Cannabis oil is a concentrate made by extracting cannabinoids such as THC and CBD into a carrier substance (oil). Most products available today involve high-tech extraction methods, where the cannabinoids are extracted and then added to a carrier such as MCT oil or hemp oil.

These processes are called “chemical extraction” methods (as opposed to “mechanical extraction” methods) because they involve a chemical solvent to extract the cannabinoids. There are a number of different solvents and processes commonly used for cannabis extraction, such as ethanol, butane and supercritical CO2, each with its own pros and cons for producers and consumers alike.

Along with cannabinoids, chemical extractions also pull out other beneficial compounds such as terpenes and flavonoids, along with less desirable compounds such as chlorophyll and waxes that can affect the final product’s look and taste. Right now, CO2 extraction is becoming the gold standard because it is non-toxic and leaves no residual solvent in the final concentrate (among other reasons).

You can also make cannabis oils at home by extracting directly into oil, though this process takes time (see How to Make Cannabis Oil below) and is generally less efficient than chemical extractions.



How does cannabis oil work?

Cannabis oil is generally taken sublingually, where it's absorbed by the mucous membrane under the tongue and inside the cheeks and eventually makes its way into the bloodstream.

Because it bypasses the stomach and liver, the bioavailability (the amount of cannabinoids that are actually available to your body after absorption) is higher than edibles, though not as high as other ingestion methods like smoking and vaping. Sublingual delivery generally takes 15 to 30 minutes to take effect, and lasts between four to six hours.

Cannabis oils can also be ingested like an edible or capsule, by adding it to smoothies, yogurt or any other food or drink.



When ingested, cannabis oil passes through the stomach and eventually to the liver, where it undergoes something called “first-pass metabolism.”

When cannabinoids take the scenic route and pass through the liver, they undergo changes that affect both the way your body utilizes them and the effect they will have. This is why edibles containing THC have the reputation for being more potent and psychedelic than other forms of consumption. Not only this, but a significant quantity is destroyed by stomach acid or broken down entirely by digestive enzymes and not used by your body at all.

This is also why onset of action is much longer, anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes depending on what you ate that day and your metabolism, among other things. The effects will last much longer, too, anywhere from six to eight hours. But because of the “first-pass effect” caused by metabolization in the liver, the bioavailability of anything you ingest is generally lower.

Depending on a person’s own GI tract, absorption can be both slow and inconsistent.

How much cannabis oil should you take?

Finding the best dose to take is an individualized process. Dosage will depend on a myriad of factors including why you're taking it, your personal physiology, endocannabinoid system, and sensitivity.

The well-used adage of “start low and go slow” is a good one because you ideally want to take the lowest possible dose that provides the effects you're after. Starting low means begin with a low dose, perhaps even lower than might be recommended on the product label. **OrganiGram suggests** starting with five drops and waiting an hour or two to see how you feel. Going slow means slowly increasing the dose until you reach the desired effect, giving your body at least a few days to adjust to the change in dose and to observe its effect.

Recent literature on the topic by Dr. Caroline MacCallum from the University of British Columbia and Dr. Ethan Russo of the International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute suggests a wise addition to the “start low go slow” mantra for dosing: “stay low.” Staying low underscores the importance of getting to that lowest possible dose where you achieve the results you are looking for.

More doesn't always mean better and there is likely a very specific dosage window that will work best for you, often referred to as “the sweet spot.” While you may need to adjust that dose over time, research suggests that most people can be fairly consistent with their dosage over the long term.

How to make your own cannabis oil

The process for making an oil at home is not unlike the process for **making cannabutter**. You will need to decarboxylate your ground cannabis before slowly heating the cannabis and oil over several hours, either in a double boiler or a crockpot. Any oil can be used, though a popular choice is coconut oil because its high fatty acid content is great for fat-loving cannabinoids.

Calculating the exact potency of your oil is tricky without having it lab tested, because cannabinoids and terpenes will be lost in the extraction process. That said, you can estimate the potency with some simple calculations. For example, say you started with a strain that had a THC content of 20%. If you infused 1 cup of oil with 3.5 grams of ground **decarboxylated cannabis**, then the approximate potency would be: 3.5 grams x 20% = 700 mg in one cup of oil. Since there are about 237 ml in one cup, if you took one dropper of oil (the standard serving size of droppers is 1 ml), the dose would be about 3mg/ml.

The biggest enemies of your cannabis oil are heat, light, air and time. All of these environmental factors will degrade the cannabinoid and terpene content. So store your oil in a cool, dark and dry place such as a cabinet or in the refrigerator. Be sure to clearly label your oil, and keep it out of reach to children and pets.