



Edible Cannabis, Cannabis Extracts and Cannabis Topicals: A Primer on the New Cannabis Products

Edible Cannabis (or Edibles)

Edible cannabis (or edibles for short) are products containing cannabinoids that you eat or drink. Cannabinoids are chemical compounds found in cannabis that can affect your mind and body when consumed. THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, is a cannabinoid that makes an individual high, euphoric and intoxicated. CBD (cannabidiol) is a non-intoxicating cannabinoid that might have some therapeutic benefit, but more research is needed to confirm its potential medical use. Edible cannabis comes in a wide range of products.¹ Although some edible cannabis products might look like normal food items, they are not food; these products are not intended to provide any nutritional value. Instead, edible cannabis products provide an alternative method of cannabis consumption to smoking and vaping.

- Some individuals perceive the high that accompanies ingesting edible cannabis as being more intense than that of smoked cannabis.² Individuals who are new to edible cannabis or cannabis should look at the THC content of the product and start with products containing no more than 2.5 mg of THC.
- It can take up to four hours to feel the full effects of edible cannabis^{3,4} and consuming more within this time can result in over-intoxication, including severe anxiety and panic, nausea and vomiting, and symptoms of psychosis (paranoia). Individuals should go slow and wait at least four hours before consuming more edible cannabis.
- The intoxicating effects can last up to 12 hours, with some residual effects lasting up to 24 hours, so you could be affected into the next day.^{3,4}
- Although some edible cannabis products might look like normal food products, they are not food and there is a risk of unintentional ingestion, especially by children^{5,6} and pets. Individuals should make sure to properly label and safely store their cannabis products out of sight and reach of children and pets.

Cannabis Extracts

Cannabis extracts refer to a broad range of products that contain higher levels of THC and CBD than what is found in the cannabis plant. THC and CBD levels in cannabis extracts can vary widely: some extracts can have up to 99% THC, whereas others can be mostly CBD with little THC. Cannabis extracts can be smoked, vaped or ingested.

- Cannabis extracts with high THC content significantly increase the risk of over-intoxication, especially when these products are “dabbed.”⁷
- “Dabbing” is a relatively new and risky method of vaping high-strength cannabis extracts. It involves heating a solid cannabis extract on a piece of metal (called a nail), and inhaling the vapours for a quick and strong high. This method of inhalation is becoming increasingly common, especially among youth.⁶ Dabbing is not recommended for people who are inexperienced with cannabis.



- Regular use of high-strength cannabis extracts is associated with tolerance, withdrawal and cannabis use disorder.^{8,9}
- Individuals who are new to cannabis should avoid high-strength cannabis products. Instead, they should start with products containing lower levels of THC. For ingestion, cannabis products containing no more than 2.5 mg of THC are recommended, and for inhalation, one or two puffs of a vape with 100 mg/g (10%) THC or less.

Cannabis Topicals

Cannabis topicals are cannabinoid-infused oils, creams and lotions that are intended for application directly to the skin, hair or nails. As with cannabis extracts, topicals vary in their THC and CBD profile, although CBD-based products appear to be increasingly popular.

- Because CBD and other substances in cannabis are thought to have anti-inflammatory properties, topicals are being used to manage peripheral pain and arthritis. However, whether topical cannabis agents are effective for treating or managing any health conditions has not yet been established.¹⁰
- The risk of intoxication and impairment following the application of a cannabinoid-infused topical is believed to be low, although there has yet to be thorough research evaluating these potential effects.
- Cannabis topicals are also used for a variety of cosmetic purposes, including skincare and haircare, as massage oils and for sexual pleasure. These appear to be fast-growing markets despite limited evidence supporting the effectiveness of cannabinoids for these purposes.

Stay tuned for additional resources on edible cannabis, cannabis extracts and cannabis topicals, including how to minimize the health and safety risks associated with these products!

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