



## Cannabis Use by Older Adult Populations

**The self-reported use of cannabis by older adults and/or seniors has grown significantly in recent years**

Nationwide, an estimated nine percent of those ages 50 or older report having consumed cannabis within the past year.

[Comparing older nonmedical and medical cannabis users: Health-related characteristics, cannabis use patterns, and cannabis sources, The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 2021](#)

Between 2016 and 2018, the self-reported use of cannabis among those ages 65 to 69 years old nearly doubled to 8 percent among men and to nearly 4 percent among women.

[Recent trends in cannabis use in older Americans, Annals of Internal Medicine, 2021](#)

**An increasing percentage of older adults are turning to the use of cannabis exclusively for therapeutic purposes**

In a survey of Medicare recipients, 21 percent of respondents reported that they were current users of cannabis for medical purposes. Survey respondents were most likely to report using cannabis products to address symptoms of anxiety, chronic pain, depression, glaucoma, and HIV/AIDS.

[1 in 5 Medicare Recipients Use Medical Marijuana, Medicareplans.com, 2022](#)

Nearly 20 percent of those US adults ages 50 and older who report consuming cannabis within the past year define their use as medicinal.

[Recent trends in cannabis use in older Americans, Annals of Internal Medicine, 2021](#)

Among a cohort of seniors (ages 65 or older) residing in a legal state (California), 78 percent of those who reported consuming cannabis within the past three years defined their use as medical. "Most older adults in the sample initiated [their] cannabis use after the age of 60 years and used it primarily for medical purposes to treat pain, sleep disturbance, anxiety, and/or depression."

[Cannabis: An emerging treatment for common symptoms in older adults, Journal of the American Geriatric Society, 2020](#)

**An increasing body of scientific data shows that the use of cannabis by older adults is associated with improvements in their overall quality of life**

"To the best of our knowledge, the present report describes one of the largest longitudinal study of authorized older medical cannabis patients to date. Given current population trends suggesting significant growth in aging populations and longer lifespans overall, finding safe, efficacious, and cost-effective treatments for geriatric care is a priority. The results of this multi-site, prospective, longitudinal study of medical cannabis patients ages 50 years and older indicate that cannabis may be a relatively safe and effective treatment for chronic pain, sleep disturbances, and other conditions associated with aging, leading to subsequent reductions in prescription drug use and healthcare costs, as well as significant improvements in quality of life."

[Medical cannabis for patients over age 50: A multi-site, prospective study of patterns of use and health outcomes, Cannabis, 2025](#)

"We aimed to document the characteristics, outcomes and prescribing patterns of individuals aged 65+ years receiving prescribed cannabis compared to younger individuals receiving prescribed cannabis. ... Self-report ratings of quality of life, general health, mood, and sleep were available at treatment entry and at a 3-month follow-up. ... Older aged individuals experience considerable improvement in health and well-being when prescribed cannabis-based medicinal products. ... These findings accord with a growing body of observational and real-world evidence from jurisdictions that have legalized medicinal cannabis that cannabis is effective for improving sleep, mood and quality of health across multiple primary conditions."

[Prescribed medical cannabis use among older individuals: Patient characteristics and improvements in well-being: Findings from T21, Drugs & Aging, 2024](#)

"We conducted a prospective observational study of patients aged 65 years or older that initiated cannabis treatment for different indications, mostly chronic non-cancer pain, during 2018–2020 in a specialized geriatric clinic. The outcomes assessed were activities of daily living (ADL), instrumental activities of daily living (IADL), pain intensity, geriatric depression scale, chronic medication use, and adverse events at six months. ... In this prospective cohort study of older adults treated with medical cannabis, we have shown that cannabis treatment for six months was associated with improvements in IADL and GDS [Geriatric Depression Scale], as well as a reduction in pain and opioid use."

[Medical cannabis is not associated with a decrease in activities of daily living in older adults, Biomedicines, 2023](#)

"In this prospective study, we describe the characteristics and outcomes of approximately 10,000 patients treated with medical cannabis. ... Quality of life (QOL) was assessed both at intake and at 6 months in 4,143 patients. While only 12.9% of patients reported good QOL prior to treatment initiation, 69.9% reported good QOL at 6 months. ... Results showed high adherence, high safety with a low incidence of adverse events, and a high rate of effectiveness in the prescribed treatment, as well as a decrease in pain levels, improvement in QOL, and a reduction in the consumption of concomitant medications."

[Adherence, safety, and effectiveness of medical cannabis and epidemiological characteristics of the patient population: A prospective study, Frontiers in Medicine, 2022](#)

### **Cannabis use by older subjects is associated with greater rates of physical activity**

"Data were obtained from the 2005–2006 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. A total of 2,092 participants (ages 20–59; 48.8% female) had accelerometer-measured sedentary behavior, light physical activity, and moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. Participants were classified as light, moderate, frequent, or non-current cannabis users depending on how often they used cannabis in the previous 30 days. ... Frequent cannabis users engaged in more physical activity than non-current users. ... Findings tended to be stronger among adults over 40 and those who did not smoke cigarettes. ... Our findings do not support the mainstream perception of cannabis users as living sedentary lifestyles."

[Cannabis use, sedentary behavior, and physical activity in a nationally representative sample of US adults, The Harm Reduction Journal, 2021](#)