



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, 19 percent of adults aged 50 to 64, and six percent of adults over the age of 65 acknowledge having consumed cannabis products within the past 12 months.

[Epidemiology of cannabis use among middle-aged and older adults in the US, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2026](#)

One in 5 people (21 percent) ages 50-plus say they used some form of cannabis – be it food, drink, flower or another type, at least once in the last year, according to a report from the University of Michigan's National Poll on Healthy Aging.

[AARP, "1 in 5 Older Adults Uses Cannabis," 2024](#)

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

Survey data published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that older adults are frequently turning to cannabis products because they believe traditional pharmaceuticals pose too many side effects and negatively impact their quality of life. "Many participants described a reluctance in using traditional pharmaceutical treatments," the study's authors concluded. "Notably, they had concerns about adverse effects, long-term health risks, or dependency associated with pharmaceutical medications and viewed cannabis as a safer alternative.

[Edible cannabis and pain, sleep, and mental health management in older adults, *JAMA Network Open*, 2026](#)

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](#)

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](#)

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](#)

Lifetime cannabis use is not associated with cognitive decline in older adults; many studies show greater cognitive performance among older cannabis consumers compared to non-users

"This study represents one of the largest observational investigations to date ... examining the relationship between cannabis use, cognitive function and dementia risk in older adults. Cannabis users demonstrated significantly better cognitive performance in cross-sectional analyses. ... Importantly, cannabis use was not associated with increased risk of dementia in either observational or MR [Mendelian randomization] analyses, indicating no supporting evidence of a causal link with cognitive decline in later life within the limits of the present data. ... Clinicians can consider that occasional or prior cannabis use may not be a major contributor to cognitive aging in this population."

[Cannabis use, cognitive function and dementia risk in older adults: Observational and genetic analysis, *BMJ Mental Health*, 2026](#)

"Using data from the UK Biobank, which includes health information from over 500,000 adults, associations between cannabis use, regional brain volume, and cognition in participants aged 40-70 years (mean age = 54.5) were evaluated. ... Lifetime cannabis use was positively associated with regional brain volume in CB1-rich regions, including the caudate, putamen, hippocampus, and amygdala. Greater lifetime use was also linked to better performance in learning, processing speed, and short-term memory. Individuals reporting use limited to adolescence also showed larger regional volumes and better cognitive performance than non-users. ... Results highlight that cannabis may influence brain health differently across the lifespan, potentially offering protective effects in older age."

[Cannabis use is associated with brain volume and cognitive function in middle-aged and older adults, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 2026](#)