

Recreational Drugs and Cancer

Most people know that substance use can cause health and other recreational drug-related problems. But many people might not know that using recreational drugs can also raise their risk of developing cancer, worsen symptoms of cancer, or interact with cancer treatments that may cause harmful side effects.

It is important for you to speak to your cancer treatment team about whether or not it is safe for you to use any legal or illicit substances during or immediately following treatment.

It is also important for you to share with your cancer care team any recreational or medical cannabis use.

Your cancer care providers treating your cancer will be able to give specific advice about whether using various substances is safe with your prescribed medications and treatment procedures or not.

Content adapted from websites below.

What is substance use?

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, illicit drugs, and tobacco. Examples include taking more over-the-counter or prescription medications than prescribed, like opioid pain relievers, in addition to substances such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and tobacco products. Someone might be considered dependent on a substance when he/she continues using it despite harmful consequences of develops increased tolerance for or withdrawal symptoms from the substance.

Where can I get help with my recreational drug use?

Substances are frequently used as a coping strategy during times of stress, like managing a cancer diagnosis and treatment. However, there are a number of treatments available to support recovery from drug use disorders and/or to help you adopt and maintain healthy coping strategies and lifestyle behaviors. If you believe you need support, talk to your care team. Your doctors and nurses can help you to navigate options. A team social worker may be a particularly good resource for you.

To talk with someone at anytime:

SAMHSA –

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

- National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Free and confidential information in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing substance abuse and mental health issues

Resources for Additional Information:

- [SAMHSA Find Treatment](#)
- [SAMHSA, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs](#)
- [Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Drug Abuse and Cancer: What You Should Know](#)
- [NIH, National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

Information on Cannabis and Cancer:

- [Illinois Department of Public Health, Medical Cannabis Patient Registry Program](#)
- [NIH, Cannabis and Cannabinoids \(PDQ®\)](#) [Español](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Marijuana and Cancer](#) [Español](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional sobre el Abuso de Drogas de Estados Unidos](#)

- [Breastcancer.org, Medical Cannabis](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Medical Marijuana and Cancer](#)