



## **Integrated Holistic Care**

### **Cannabis for Autism**

### **Patient Handbook**

Welcome! We are excited to share this valuable information with you about medicinal cannabis including how to incorporate its use in your daily life to optimize your health and well-being. Our mission is to provide patient education with the goal of improving targeted health outcomes via cannabis therapeutics.

For those who have purchased this handbook separately from a consultation, this includes the general guidance offered during each consult. We have also provided a patient self-questionnaire to help you determine whether a consultation is warranted given your specific situation. No worries, if you decide to schedule a consultation we will credit back the cost of the handbook (if purchased prior).

For those who are receiving this handbook as an inclusion to your consultation, please know we take an individualized approach with each client to ensure your goals are prioritized and your unique situation is addressed. Please review these handbook contents in preparation for your consultation, and refer back to it frequently as you embark on this journey!

## **Table of Contents**

Page:

2: Introduction to Our Team and Consultation Services

3: Patient Self-Questionnaire

4. The Endocannabinoid System

5. Identifying Medicinally Optimal Products

6. Need To Know Information

8. Methods of Administration/Format

9-10. Accessible Cannabinoids

10. Terpenes

11. Getting Started

12. Cannabis Response Tracker

## Introduction

At **Integrated Holistic Care** we strive to close the gap in health care that overwhelms cannabis patients as their traditional health care providers often lack knowledgeable about the benefits of medicinal cannabis for Autism. If they are aware, they are generally not prepared assess considerations and provide individualized guidance to optimize cannabis therapy outcomes.

Janna Champagne is our Autism-specialty nurse, and Mom of a teen daughter with Autism, successfully using cannabis therapy. Here's a link to her story, along with the rationale and research supporting cannabis as a viable intervention for targeting autism symptoms:

[www.integratedholisticcare.com/news](http://www.integratedholisticcare.com/news)

For more information about Janna, including her many roles in the cannabis industry, please visit [www.jannachampagne.com](http://www.jannachampagne.com)

First, it's important to understand when seeking medical oversight of cannabis therapy is important. The statements below are meant to help determine whether seeking professional oversight of cannabis therapy is recommended.

### Patient Self-Questionnaire

Circle "Y" for Yes or "N" for No

- Y N I would like to pursue an individualized approach to optimize my health.
- Y N I am currently taking pharmaceuticals or would like to reduce my pharma reliance.
- Y N I'm seeking cannabis for a child or adolescent patient (**especially important with THC**).
- Y N I have been diagnosed with cancer.
- Y N I have cardiac or respiratory illness (arrhythmia, high or low blood pressure, asthma etc).
- Y N I have been diagnosed with diabetes.
- Y N I have a mental health disorder (schizophrenia, bipolar, anxiety, etc).
- Y N I'm seeking to optimize my cannabis, to manage/improve a chronic or complex condition.

If you answered "Yes" to any of the above questions, seeking advice from a medical professional is important to ensure safe and optimal medical cannabis use. Integrated Holistic Care consultations include assessment of your health history, and individual considerations of cannabis therapy (ie: interactions with medications and supplements), plus development of an individualized care plan to target your specific needs and goals. For more information or to schedule a consult, please visit our website at: [www.integratedholisticcare.com](http://www.integratedholisticcare.com)

## Introduction to the EndoCannabinoid System

To understand medical cannabis therapy, it's helpful to know about the Endocannabinoid System (ECS). Most medical professionals weren't taught about the science of this master control system in college, much thanks to our recent cannabis prohibition in the US. Now that cannabis is becoming more readily accessible, research has emerged revealing the vital nutrients in cannabis are needed to support optimal health balance (homeostasis). In fact, when our bodies function effectively, our ECS produces endocannabinoids which promote overall balance, and are even considered vital for life. When our bodies are deficient in endocannabinoids, commonly due to prolonged illness or health imbalances, the cannabis plant cannabinoids (phytocannabinoids) are a great supplement alternative. In fact, cannabinoids found in the cannabis plant, such as THC and CBD, act exactly the same way as our internally made endocannabinoids. We know that the underlying cause of chronic illness (including Autism) is imbalance(s), so the "Entourage Effect" or synergy of cannabis can be profoundly therapeutic for promoting homeostasis, thereby improving the root cause of symptoms (1).

In addition to Cannabis, there are many other plant sources of cannabinoids or ECS support that may be useful including (2):

1. Echinacea: immune system regulation, pain and inflammation
2. Black Pepper: immune balance, pain and inflammation
3. Flax Seeds: inflammation
4. Cacao: improves Endocannabinoid action
5. Black Truffles: mood stabilization and pain
6. Liverwort: similar to THC
7. Helichrysum: contains CBG, anti-depressant, mood stabilization, inflammation, pain
8. Chinese Labrodor: infections, cancer

## Identifying Medical Quality Cannabis

Ensure the products you choose now or in the future meet the FLOW criteria to promote best potential health outcomes.

### FLOWER DERIVED

- Look for products that are derived from primarily flower/bud

### LAB TESTED

- For accurate dosing and to ensure no contaminants are present.
- Ask to see batch test results and review for cannabinoid and terpene profiles as well as absence of potential harmful contaminants including herbicides, pesticides, heavy metals, bacteria and mold.

### ORGANIC

- Clean Green Certified/Organic growing and processing standards

### WHOLE PLANT

- Concentrated as nature intended preserving all plant compounds. This is achieved through food grade ethanol extraction (preferably organic cane alcohol) or infusion
- Other extraction methods result in less optimal product for disease fighting potential including the risk of leaving toxic solvents behind.
- CO2 extraction is not optimal as plant compounds are isolated then reconstituted. Often, valuable cannabinoids, terpenes and other elements including chlorophyll (oxygenating promoting alkaline environment), fatty acids (promote absorption) and flavonoids (antioxidant protecting against damage from free radicals) that contribute to the entourage effect are left out.

For more detailed information, please visit our sister website Cannabis Nurse Approved, whose mission is to educate patients about what constitutes medical quality cannabis, and provide open source information on medical quality suppliers. Our article “Four Criteria for Ensuring Cannabis is Medical Quality” details the rationale and reviews the research supporting the above criteria: <https://www.cannabispnurseapproved.com/post/four-criteria-for-assuring-cannabis-is-medical-quality>

## Need to Know Information

### Considerations

Everyone is unique, and this includes our tendency to respond individually to cannabis. Where one formulation may work well for an individual, it's possible that another (even in a similar situation) will respond in a different way to the same formula. As listed in our patient self-questionnaire, certain conditions or situations may entail considerations, or even risk factors, when combined with cannabis therapy. It's important to review common considerations of cannabis therapy with a health professional that understands cannabis to ensure safe and effective cannabis use. Our goal is to educate our clients how to schedule or manage their cannabis regimen, to reduce any possible factors that may impede the efficacy of their cannabis therapy.

### PHARMACEUTICAL AND SUPPLEMENTATION INTERACTIONS

CYP450 enzymes are involved in the metabolism of many pharmaceuticals and supplements, and also cannabis. We do not have enough research available at this time to determine the potential impact in all situations, but do know that if the same enzymes or transporters are utilized by multiple interventions, there is potential for interaction that can result in additive effects or reduction of the benefit of one or both agents. In certain combinations, the combination may increase the toxicity risk if dosing is not spaced properly. Therefore, as a general recommendation, **we advise spacing cannabis therapeutics a minimum of 2 hours from prescription medications and supplements unless otherwise indicated.** There may be situations, as listed above, that require an even more conservative approach to avoid interactions.

### Safe and Legal Access

We advocate for cannabis, which has evolved and provided humans vital health balancing for thousands of years, to once again be considered a basic human right (regardless of patient location). Our hope is that all patients will soon have the right to choose their preferred treatment modality including cannabis, and we encourage a legal medical recommendation whenever possible. As nurses, we do not discriminate, but instead freely educate patients regardless of their location. That said, we are not attorneys and do not provide legal advice, so patients should be aware of the legal ramifications should cannabis possession/use become apparent in their area of residence, to ensure the choice is made from a fully informed decision-making process.

## **Can I overdose?**

Cannabis overdose is not dangerous, and no harm has occurred from cannabis in 5000 years of historical use. Taking more cannabis than the ECS is accustomed to having may result in unpleasant side effects, including sedation and decreased function, or in severe forms nausea, vomiting, and dizziness. To avoid these potential side effects, begin with a low starting dose, and increase slowly over time, using individual response to guide when and how much to increase. If side effects develop, decrease to the previous tolerated dose for a couple of days before attempting to increase the dose again to build tolerance. Use of medical cannabis may initially cause an exacerbation of symptoms if dose is increased too quickly.

## **What side effects might I experience?**

Expected side effects of therapeutic dosing of cannabis include dry mouth and eyes, sedation, dizziness, and psychotropic effect that may impair thought processes and judgment. Therefore it's recommended to abstain from driving or operate heavy machinery while under the influence of intoxicating forms of cannabis (ie: THC, CBN). As with any other supplement, individual responses may vary.

Possible adverse effects of cannabis that are less common include: increased heart rate, increased appetite, sleepiness, dizziness, decreased blood pressure, dry mouth/dry eyes, decreased urination, hallucination, paranoia, anxiety, fatigue, suicidal ideation, nausea, asthenia impaired attention, memory, and psychomotor performance. Inhaled cannabis may trigger worsening symptoms of asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema; cardiac disease; and alcohol or other drug dependence. In those diagnosed psychosis, some forms of cannabis use may exacerbate risk of suicide, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or other psychotic conditions.

## **Is Cannabis Addictive?**

For those who are predisposed, cannabis abuse is possible and defined as “problematic pattern of cannabis use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress; the clinical indications are included in the DSM-5.” In those using cannabis daily for months, cessation may produce mild physical withdrawal symptoms including: insomnia, loss of appetite and restlessness initially, then irritability/anger, vivid and unpleasant dreams after a week.

## **What if the patient is a child or adolescent?**

When medical cannabis is desired for a patient in childhood or adolescence stages of life, assessment to review the individual's neurodevelopmental risk factors of cannabis use is important. Having a knowledgeable medical professional review and weigh the risks and possible benefits of cannabis for minors may help mitigate any risk factors that are present.

## **What if I become too intoxicated from THC?**

CBD acts as an antagonist at the receptor site THC attaches to. Therefore, if the intoxicating effect of THC is causing discomfort, taking CBD may help decrease the "high." Chewing on a black peppercorn may also yield relief.

## **Hydration**

Intensive medical cannabis may cause dehydration, so to mitigate we recommend ample fluid intake of 3 liters per day for adults (unless contraindicated by fluid restrictions). If you experience dry mucous membranes (eyes, mouth), this is an indicator that more fluid is needed. Using an electrolyte infused beverage like Smart Water is helpful to hydrate with less fluid intake. Moistening eye drops may also provide relief from dry, red, itchy eyes.

## **Safety and Storage**

Cannabis storage is important to avoid product degradation, and ensure the safety of those who might accidentally gain access. Keep cannabis out of the reach of children, minors, and non-authorized individuals by storing in a lock box or other secure location. For raw formulations of cannabis, it's best to keep in cool, dry, and dark place. When in doubt, follow labeling storage guidelines and abide by expiration dates. Disposal of unused cannabis products should be completed according to the DEA's Disposal Act.<sup>41</sup> Generally, one can locate a collection receptacle via the DEA Registration Call Center at (800) 882-9539.



## Methods of Administration/Format

Depending on the administration method, length of response varies.

- For inhaled, sublingual (under tongue) or buccal (rubbing on gums) administration, effect begins as quickly as 5-10 minutes and generally lasts 2-3 hours.
- For ingested/swallowed cannabis, effect typically begins in 30 minutes to an hour and lasts 6-8 hours (dependent on your metabolism).

### Sublingual Cannabis Titration Guide

Sublingual tinctures are one of the easiest cannabis formats to use when first experimenting with cannabis, to find the optimal amount needed to address symptoms effectively. Since everyone responds individually to cannabis, the amount needed will also vary. Sublingual dosing with cannabis tincture takes effect quickly (onset is 5-10 minutes) and subsequently has a short duration (lasts 2-3 hours). Sublingual tincture is dilute compared with full extract oil, making it much easier to titrate and duplicate an exact amount consistently. We recommend proceeding as follows:

1. Drop the recommended amount of tincture under the tongue, and leave it there for 30 seconds to a minute if possible. Full effect of this method, which entails absorption directly into the bloodstream, is typically felt in 10-15 minutes, and more may be taken if desired. Administration may be repeated in 2-3 hours with further adjustments if stronger or weaker effect is desired.
2. This method also tests cannabis strain compatibility, so even if the initial administration has a negative effect, the short duration of effect (2-3 hours) and small amount given should minimize any negative effect. If needed, chewing a black peppercorn can stop the effect of THC more quickly. Taking activated charcoal may mitigate the negative response of CBD, should this occur.
3. Once the optimal amount of cannabis tincture is determined through the above experimentation process (step 1), document the effective amount for future reference. Once the effective amount is determined, tincture may be dropped into an empty capsule and swallowed to elongate the effect. Ingested cannabis may take up to an hour to feel full effect, and duration lasts 6-8 hours.

Even with educated guidance, it may take a few tries to find your optimal cannabis regimen, and this experimentation is an expected part of the process, which most find well worth the effort.

## Other Administration Methods

Topical applications of cannabis may be useful for reducing pain and inflammation symptoms quickly at the local application site, and cannabis topicals don't absorb systemically. We suggest using topicals and an adjunct to oral or sublingual methods of dosing if the target is deeper systemic health goals.

Suppositories are not research-supported for effective absorption, and while some patients report symptom relief there are also risk factors to this method of administration. In general, we don't recommend suppositories for these reasons.

## Cannabinoids Review

Although the cannabis plant has 140+ cannabinoids that we know of to date, this section only lists the cannabinoids that are reliably accessible for purchase.

**CBD:** CBD boasts the most research-supported indications of any other cannabinoid (of the 140+ known today). This cannabinoid is not intoxicating, and legal in most states of the US thanks to recent Hemp Act legislation that legalized all CBD products containing less than 0.3% THC. CBD has many research-supported uses including pain, inflammation, infections, diabetes, and mental health disorders. CBD may also decrease the efficacy of THC, and may be useful for improving unpleasant symptoms in the case of accidental over ingestion. CBD from hemp (less than 0.3% THC) is accessible and legal in most states of the US thanks to the Hemp Act of 2018, making it the most easily accessible cannabinoid. Be cautious and ensure any purchase meets our FLOW criteria for the best possible health outcomes.

\*For Autism, CBD may not be the best option for with more complex medical issues (ie: non/limited verbal, aggressive behaviors) this may not be the best place to start.\*

Here's an article on the subject, and why prior interventions may be necessary to improve CBD response in those with Autism:  
<http://www.integratedholisticcare.com/blog/cannabidiol-cbd-for-autism-and-related-immune-disorders>

**CBDa:** CBDa is the raw form of CBD, that will convert upon heating or decarboxylating, which removes the acid molecule and converts it into CBD. CBDa is not intoxicating, and supported by research as potentially beneficial for improving nausea, inflammation, and breast cancer. For Autism, CBDa may be an appropriate option for those targeting inflammation, seizures, and GI imbalances.

**THC:** THC is the most controversial of cannabinoids, and as of this writing is still federally designated as a Schedule 1 substance (despite meeting zero of the three criteria for schedule one placement). Despite its reputation, THC also has research-supported therapeutic applications, and may improve PTSD, cancer, HIV/AIDS, Autism, Parkinsons and Alzheimer's Disease. For Autism, THC is often considered (and risk/benefit weighed) for patients with self-injury and aggression. Research reflects that Anandamide (the endocannabinoid synonymous with THC) is deficient in those with Autism, so THC may fill an important nutrient deficiency as well:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5848550/>

**THCa:** THCa is the raw form of THC, which converts upon heating or decarboxylating by removing the acid molecule, resulting in THC. THCa in its raw form is not intoxicating, and research supports its potent anti-inflammatory effect. For Autism, THCa may be helpful for targeting pain (self-injury), inflammation, and reducing meltdown behaviors without intoxication.

**CBG:** CBG is derived from CBGa, the stem cell cannabinoid from which all of the 140+ other cannabinoids evolve. Decarbing/heating turns CBGa into CBG, a non-intoxicating cannabinoid, supported by research for targeting gastrointestinal issues (IBS, Crohn's, Colorectal Cancer), infections, and inflammation. CBG tends to have a stimulating/energizing effect, so best to try earlier in the day, and avoid taking later in the day if response may impede sleep (common in those sensitive to stimulants like caffeine). In Autism, CBG is supported by research for reducing inflammation (especially in the brain), improving gut function, and it shows promise for promoting speech development. Research also supports that CBG may help increase GABA levels in the brain, potentially correcting this common neurotransmitter imbalance found in Autism.

**CBN:** CBN occurs from degradation or breakdown of THC, and tends to be costly since it's been difficult to reliably source. CBN is extremely intoxicating and sedative, and as such research supports its use for sleep disorders or insomnia. For Autism, CBN may be utilized at bedtime, to promote improved sleep quality.

## Terpenes

Terpenes are the aromatic plant compounds that give cannabis strains their distinct “smells.” Research on terpenes has revealed they offer medicinal benefits, and often enhance or elevate the cannabis effects. I don’t suggest experimenting with straight terpenes, since this option requires careful research (or the help of a trained professional) since the therapeutic vs toxic doses vary greatly. Here’s an informative article on the subject of cannabis terpenes: <http://www.ljfrank.com/guest-column-terpenes-and-cannabis-by-sue-degregorio-rosen-rn-clnc/>

Terpenes are how we classify a cannabis strain as indica or sativa, common terms used in our industry to describe the overall effect as sedative vs energizing. This is helpful for determining which types of strains may work best to help you meet your objectives without impairing your energy levels or triggering pre-existing symptoms.

### Choosing Indica or Sativa:

- Indica strains tend to relax making them ideal for nighttime use.
- Sativa strains typically energize and are ideal for daytime use. Use with caution if you have a cardiac arrhythmia or anxiety and discontinue use if exacerbation occurs.

In Autism, if calming is the objective, indica strains (containing linalool, myrcene, or humulene) seem to be the best option.

If a child with Autism presents as ADD/ADHD, and responds therapeutically by calming when given stimulants (ie: Ritalin, coffee), then a Sativa strain (containing Limonene or Pinene) may be the better option to target calming and enhance focus. Sativas may trigger anxiety in those prone, so a hybrid containing both Indica and Sativa may be optimal in that situation.

As is common in Autism, those with taste aversions may not tolerate sublingual dosing (drops under the tongue) which is recommended for the experimental process. Many of our approved suppliers will add organic essential oils to “flavor” the tincture, and adding the oil to a favorite food may also improve acceptance. If all else fails, adding tincture to an empty capsule for swallowing alleviates any taste aversion issues, and for those who have difficulty, “pill straws” are a great option to facilitate this method of delivery. Keep in mind that swallowed forms aren’t as optimal for experimentation, or to achieve quick results (ie: impending meltdown), since metabolism takes much longer (1-2 hours average). For faster response, sublingual or inhaled may be the more effective method of administration.

## Getting Started

Now that you have some general education about cannabis and its potentially therapeutic components, we will guide you through experimenting to find an optimal regimen. The ideal dose and schedule is dependent on the symptoms/illness being targeted, combined with the individual response to cannabinoid therapeutics. If you purchased a consult, our nurse's guidance is better suited to help you determine which format, cannabinoids, terpenes and schedule best suits your individual needs to get started. The following are general recommendations only:

- First dose should be taken on a "free" day- without need to drive, work, etc.
- If more than one product is recommended or potentially beneficial, start them one at a time and document any observations you may have about your response/the acute effect (using attached symptom tracking form)
- Take with a meal or snack to prevent symptoms of low blood sugar (ie shakiness, weakness, nausea, irritability)
- Hold/do not take 72 hours/3 days prior to any scheduled surgery or invasive procedure
- If you stop taking cannabis, especially THC, for more than a few days, your tolerance will likely be decreased (receptors are reset). Be cautious and start with a low dose when reintroducing. Gauge upward titration on response.

When starting a new or unfamiliar product, it's always best to start by micro-dosing, or starting with a very low dose and increasing according to your individual tolerance. This prevents ingesting more than needed to manage symptoms which may be wasteful (although not likely harmful), and helps to mitigate any adverse side effects of bypassing tolerance levels. Lifestyle considerations such as the need for optimal daytime function, or preference to remain incognito with cannabis use are additional factors in finding optimal dose and regimen.

In general, the goal with cannabis therapy is to experiment and find the regimen that manages the targeted symptoms effectively in 2-3 doses/day. It's important to remember that cannabis intake is very flexible, meaning on days with increased symptoms, increasing the dose or taking extra between doses is acceptable and safe (spacing as advised from pharmaceuticals of course). Any increases or extra doses of intoxicating cannabinoids require consideration of possible impairment in function.

Patient Response Tracking Journal

Target Symptom: \_\_\_\_\_  
Symptom Severity (before intake): \_\_\_\_\_ (on a scale of 0 to 10)  
Delivery Method (circle): Sublingual    Oral (swallowed)    Inhaled    Topical  
Product: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_  
Symptom Severity (post intake): \_\_\_\_\_ (on a scale of 0 to 10)  
Response felt in \_\_\_\_\_ minutes    Effect lasted \_\_\_\_\_ hours  
Negative Effects: Y    N    If Y then detail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Target Symptom: \_\_\_\_\_  
Symptom Severity (before intake): \_\_\_\_\_ (on a scale of 0 to 10)  
Delivery Method (circle): Sublingual    Oral (swallowed)    Inhaled    Topical  
Product: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_  
Symptom Severity (post intake): \_\_\_\_\_ (on a scale of 0 to 10)  
Response felt in \_\_\_\_\_ minutes    Effect lasted \_\_\_\_\_ hours  
Negative Effects: Y    N    If Y then detail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Target Symptom: \_\_\_\_\_  
Symptom Severity (before intake): \_\_\_\_\_ (on a scale of 0 to 10)  
Delivery Method (circle): Sublingual    Oral (swallowed)    Inhaled    Topical  
Product: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_  
Symptom Severity (post intake): \_\_\_\_\_ (on a scale of 0 to 10)  
Response felt in \_\_\_\_\_ minutes    Effect lasted \_\_\_\_\_ hours  
Negative Effects: Y    N    If Y then detail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Questions?**

**Please visit our website for FAQ answers, or to Contact Us.**

**Thank you from**



**We appreciate your support!**