

Medicinal and recreational cannabis use before surgery

The most common and well-studied types of cannabis (marijuana) include THC and CBD. One of the many reasons it is used is to control pain; however, studies show the use of cannabis prior to surgery causes higher pain scores, poor sleep and more narcotic use than non-cannabis users.

Cannabis is also used for nausea. For some, nausea and vomiting are side effects of anesthesia medication; however, studies show chronic cannabis use increases these side effects after surgery due to the way it interacts with anesthesia medications.

For an anesthesiologist, your three most important body systems are your brain, heart and lungs. Here are some of the effects that cannabis has on your body:

Your brain:

Cannabis causes sedation and relaxation, similar to alcohol. Patients using marijuana plus-or-minus alcohol may present more often to anesthesiologists for emergency surgeries related to traffic accidents caused by slowing the reaction time of drivers and making them weave between traffic lanes. Anesthesia medication also sedates, which can contribute to increased difficulty awakening from anesthesia.

Your heart:

Cannabis increases your heart rate and lowers your blood pressure. Using this drug prior to surgery can increase your risk of heart attack and cause heart rhythm problems after.

Your lungs:

Cannabis contains cancerous chemicals and irritates the lungs. Vaping cannabis oil increases the inhalation of respiratory carcinogens and irritant compounds, which can injure your lungs. Chronic use has similar effects to tobacco smokers, such as chronic cough, bronchitis and emphysema – also known as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Please keep in mind:

Using cannabis prior to your surgery can have a major impact on your body when undergoing anesthesia. For your health and safety, we suggest cessation (quitting) of all types of cannabis use. This is very important prior to surgery to help decrease the risk of complications. If you use cannabis up to two hours before surgery, your surgery could be delayed or cancelled.

References:

American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine (2023)