

Cannabis use and surgery: What you should know

Cannabis — also known as marijuana — is commonly used to manage pain or nausea. But if you use cannabis regularly or plan to use it before surgery, it's important to know how it can affect your body during anesthesia.

The most well-known components of cannabis are THC and CBD. While these may help with some symptoms in daily life, studies show that using cannabis before surgery is linked to:

- Higher pain levels after surgery
- Increased need for narcotic pain medication
- Poorer sleep
- More nausea and vomiting, especially with anesthesia

How cannabis affects your body during surgery

Your anesthesiologist closely monitors your brain, heart and lungs during surgery. Cannabis use can make that job more difficult — and increase your risk of complications

- **Brain:** Cannabis can cause sedation and slow reaction time, like alcohol. When combined with anesthesia, this can make it harder for you to wake up after surgery. Cannabis use is also associated with a higher risk of emergency surgeries related to accidents, especially when used with alcohol.
- **Heart:** Cannabis increases your heart rate and lowers your blood pressure which can raise your risk of heart rhythm problems or even heart attack during or after surgery. These risks increase when cannabis is used within 24 hours of anesthesia being administered.
- **Lungs:** Cannabis smoke and vapor contain chemicals that can irritate and damage your lungs. Regular use — including vaping cannabis oil — is linked to a higher risk of chronic cough, bronchitis and emphysema, especially if you have underlying lung conditions like COPD.

What you need to do

For your safety, we strongly recommend stopping all types of cannabis use before surgery. If cannabis is used within two hours of your scheduled procedure, your surgery may be delayed or canceled.

Talk with your care team if you have questions or need help stopping before surgery — we're here to support you.

Reference

American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine (2023)