



How to Talk to Your Doctor about Medical Marijuana

Start the conversation with your doctor.

Patients and caregivers are often nervous about discussing medical marijuana due to the stigma still associated with the treatment option. It has become common practice for patients and caregivers to ask physicians about new and alternative treatments. As a patient or caregiver, you have the right to ask about medical marijuana, a safe and effective treatment.

Act 16 went into effect on May 17, 2016, making medical marijuana legal under Pennsylvania law. Federal courts have ruled that doctors are allowed to discuss and recommend medical marijuana to patients.

If you are already using marijuana, you may want to proceed with caution if your doctor is unsupportive. While it is important to consult your physician about your treatment, on rare occasions we have heard of doctors withholding other pain medications from patients who use cannabis. If it is clear your doctor is opposed to medical marijuana and uninterested in learning about it, you may want to try to find a doctor who is more open to it.

Be prepared to educate your doctor.

Your doctor may be unfamiliar with the research and evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of medical marijuana. When preparing for your appointment, review reputable resources and bring materials with you, if possible.

The Pennsylvania law requires doctors participate in a four-hour course before issuing recommendations. This will allow them an opportunity to learn more about treatment options.

Doctors may also be confused about the law itself. Make sure you are prepared to answer basic questions about the program. While doctors cannot prescribe marijuana, issuing recommendations to patients does not violate federal law. Provide your doctor a copy of our Pennsylvania Guide for Patients and Doctors, which is available [here](#).

Another helpful resource is our [research document](#), which contains numerous studies about the conditions included in Act 16. If during your conversation your doctor asks any questions you cannot answer, please contact MPP at state@mpp.org. You can also contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health or encourage your doctor to do the same. Make sure to follow up with your doctor with any information you offered to provide.

Be persistent, patient, and practical.

Many doctors have little or no experience with medical marijuana. They may have misconceptions about the treatment based on the federal government's policy or the fact that it was not covered in medical school. When faced with a new area of medicine, they may be resistant or even obstinate.

Pennsylvania patients have waited a long time for access to medical marijuana, so it may be frustrating if your doctor is not immediately accepting of the idea. However, you should not be discouraged. Respond to inaccuracies with facts, emotion with evidence, and resistance with persistence.

Talk to other patients.

Every doctor-patient relationship is unique, but there are some shared experiences. Pennsylvania has a broad and supportive medical marijuana patient advocacy community. Many patients and caregivers in Pennsylvania have already started discussing the issue with their doctors and can give you advice based on their experiences.
