



Pain Calls for  
**TRANSFORMATION**

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## **GUIDELINES FOR MEDICAL CANNABIS TREATMENT**

*Medical cannabis treatment is NOT one thing!!* You can't just pick up some weed at random, smoke it, and expect miraculous results. There are myriad strains of cannabis and many modes of administration. That's why it's so confusing! You will need to experiment in order to find out what works best for you—no way around it. These notes are intended to help you do that. *I am a Chronic Pain Coach, certified by Michael Moskowitz, MD, MPH, and hold a Certificate in Cannabis Science from the University of Vermont.* If you have a medical cannabis recommendation from a doctor, I can work with you as you find the treatment that best serves your needs. For more information go to [paincallsfortransformation.com](http://paincallsfortransformation.com).

### **GUIDELINES**

1. *I'm serious about this. Ask your doctor* if you are a good candidate for medical cannabis treatment. I am a huge fan of medical cannabis. It is very safe, which is to say that no one has died simply from ingesting it. (Driving under the influence is another thing.) Cannabis has helped me immeasurably and the research convinces me it can help countless others. That said, *some people absolutely should NOT use medical cannabis*. A doctor can help you figure out whether you are one of those people.
2. You should be aware of the laws in your state or country.
3. *Find a reliable cannabis dispensary*. It is likely that the products from a dispensary meeting the following criteria will be somewhat more expensive, especially on what are called, "high CBD" products. (More on this later.) In my experience, on this, you get what you pay for.
  - a. You are looking for a dispensary that can tell you the ratio of the two most prevalent cannabinoids, CBD and THC, as well as their concentrations. This doesn't matter so much for recreational use, but if you are trying to discover the best way to use medical cannabis, this information is a must.
  - b. You are looking for a dispensary that carries high CBD products. I define a high CBD product as one with a CBD:THC ratio of at least 15:1.

4. There are over 100 cannabinoids in the cannabis plant, (and some terpenes and flavonoids too). The two we hear about most are CBD and THC, (THC being the main psychoactive component of cannabis). Research has shown that many of the other compounds in cannabis, including some of the terpenes, have a beneficial effect as well. **Researchers have identified what they call an “entourage effect” when a variety of cannabinoids are taken together** using the plant. This is why using the cannabis plant, with its 100 or more cannabinoids, rather than synthetic formulations of CBD or THC, is preferred.
  - i. **Extending this logic, while you could take this too far, it is generally better to use a variety of strains of medical cannabis in your treatment, rather than using just one. You are looking for a “broad cannabinoid profile.” Different strains will give you that.**
5. **Modes of Administration:** There are many ways to use cannabis—smoking, vaping (preferable to smoking; it is not as hard on your lungs), edibles, tinctures among others. It’s not a rule, but for the sake of simplicity, in treating chronic pain, **I’d suggest starting with tinctures.** (I prefer alcohol based tinctures; oil based tinctures are a bit too aromatic for my taste. That said, in terms of effect, it doesn’t matter.) Typically, tinctures last 8 hours.
6. **You can use a high THC alcohol based tincture as a topical treatment without any discernable psychoactive effects.** The results can be amazing! Roll it onto a painful area, but not on an open wound. (Note: topical treatments will show up in a urine test.)
7. Generally speaking, you do not want to begin using a new cannabis product on Monday morning at 9 AM while driving to work. I hope you see why :-). **Take the first dose when you have some time to relax.**
8. Generally speaking, start taking cannabis in the evening, adding a morning or even an afternoon dose once you have a sense of how you tolerate it.
9. **Generally speaking, for pain, I would suggest you begin with strains of cannabis that are high in CBD and low in THC.** (A ratio of at least 15:1—CBD:THC) THC is psychoactive; CBD is not. You would need a whole lot of a 15:1 tincture to get high.
10. That does not mean that THC is bad. In fact, **because of the entourage effect, it is often true that, (assuming you can tolerate it), you’ll need a bit of THC in your “cannabis diet,”** to get the best effect. Assuming you don’t want to feel the psychoactive effects of cannabis, (or at least don’t want to feel them while you’re working), there are ways to get some THC into your system without being overwhelmed by the psychoactive effects.
  - a. As it happens, I no longer like to “get high,” so I generally ingest a higher THC strain, 4:1, before bed. That way I might be a little high while asleep, but I don’t know it.

- b. During the day when I need something for “breakthrough pain,” I vape a 7:1 strain. You’ll need to experiment to find out how much you can take in without feeling the psychoactive effects. Who knows, maybe you’ll be able to deal with a 4:1 strain. Some vape a 24:1 strain. You won’t get high from that!
  - c. There is some evidence that high concentrations of CBD counteract the psychoactive effects of THC. You could experiment to see how it affects you.
11. ***You may have heard about Indica strains and Sativa strains of cannabis.*** Common wisdom suggests that Indica strains offer a “body high,” (whatever that means), and are good for situations where you need to be calm—sleep for instance. Common wisdom suggests that Sativa strains offer more mental stimulation. That said, recent studies have shown that the cannabinoid profiles of both these classes of cannabis range the whole gamut. This calls the common wisdom into some question. All the same, I’m apt to follow the common wisdom.
  12. Generally speaking, ***when you begin using a new cannabis product, start with a low dose and work up to a therapeutic dose.***
    - a. Increasing the dose of a cannabis product does not automatically increase the benefit. ***Generally speaking, you should start with a low dose, (5 drops of a given tincture for instance), and increase the dose each day until you experience a beneficial effect.*** If you increase the dose further, you may well get more benefit. Eventually however, you will find that increasing the dose produces *less* benefit! You’re looking for the “sweet spot,” so when you get to that point, step back to the dose that gave you the best result. If you get to 30 drops and still have no beneficial effect, you should consider trying a different cannabis product. (Note: your sweet spot can change over time.)
  13. ***If you experience unwanted side effects with any product, just back off the dose*** to the level where the side effects are tolerable . . . ***and don’t be afraid to talk to your doctor about it!*** (If you don’t have a doctor you can trust to talk to about this, find one!)
  14. ***Keep this in mind*** . . . most cannabis products do not have a fixed cannabinoid profile because the cannabinoids change over time, especially when exposed to light or heat.
  15. Eventually you may want to experiment with capsules, edibles and more, or you may just want more information. ***I would suggest [Medical Cannabis; a Guide for Patients, Practitioners, and Caregivers, by Michael Moskowitz, MD, MPH](#).*** Dr. Moskowitz is a pain specialist. His book offers both theoretical and practical information. ([Available on Amazon](#))