

Dangers of Combining Cannabis with Mental Health Medications

⚠️ **Serious Warning: Cannabis Use Can Be Dangerous When Combined with Mental Health Medications**

If you're taking medication for a mental health condition—like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia—**using cannabis (marijuana) at the same time can be risky and even dangerous**. While cannabis may seem like a harmless or natural way to relax, it can seriously interfere with your treatment and mental stability.

Even occasional cannabis use can **cause harmful side effects**, reduce how well your medications work, or worsen your symptoms. In some cases, it can trigger **severe psychiatric reactions** or lead to hospitalization.

🚫 **What Are the Dangers?**

Combining cannabis with psychotropic (mental health) medications can result in:

- **Serious side effects** – Cannabis can increase medication levels in your body, causing excessive sedation, dizziness, confusion, or agitation.
 - **Worsening of mental health** – Cannabis can trigger anxiety, panic attacks, depression, paranoia, or even full-blown **psychosis**.
 - **Psychiatric instability** – Especially in people with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, cannabis may trigger manic or psychotic episodes that require emergency care.
 - **Reduced effectiveness of medication** – Cannabis interferes with how your body processes psychiatric drugs, which means your meds may stop working or become toxic.
 - **Dangerous sedation** – Using cannabis with sedatives or anti-anxiety meds (like Xanax or Ativan) increases the risk of overdose-like effects, including blackouts or respiratory issues.
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⚠️ **Potential Medical Complications**

Cannabis use alongside psychiatric medications doesn't just affect your mental state—it can also lead to **serious physical health complications**, including:

- **Heart problems:** Cannabis can raise heart rate and blood pressure, increasing the risk of arrhythmias, heart attack, or stroke—especially when combined with certain antidepressants or stimulants.
- **Seizures:** When combined with medications like clozapine or bupropion, cannabis may increase seizure risk.
- **Liver strain or damage:** Cannabis and psychiatric medications are both processed through the liver, potentially increasing the risk of liver enzyme elevation, inflammation, or drug toxicity.
- **Gastrointestinal distress:** Nausea, vomiting, and appetite changes can worsen with cannabis, especially when combined with antidepressants which increases Serotonin levels, a chemical in the brain, blood and gastrointestinal tract or medications to treat psychosis.
- **Sleep disruption:** Though cannabis is sometimes used for sleep, long-term use can disrupt REM sleep cycle which is necessary to integrate memories related to motor skills, learning, mood regulation and processing emotional experiences. REM is the dreaming cycle of the brain. It can also worsen insomnia, particularly when it interacts with sedative medications.
- **Increased fall or injury risk:** Drowsiness, slowed reaction times, and poor coordination can be worsened when combining cannabis with medications that already impair motor skills.

Diagnoses and Medications Where Cannabis Use Is Strongly Contraindicated

If you have **any** of the following conditions, **cannabis is not safe to use**:

- Schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder
- Bipolar disorder (especially Type I)
- Major depressive disorder
- Generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, or PTSD
- Any history of **psychosis**, hallucinations, or paranoia
- A current or past **substance use disorder**

It is especially unsafe if you are prescribed:

- **Lithium** – Cannabis can increase the risk of dangerous toxicity
 - **Clozapine** – Cannabis may raise the risk of seizures and interfere with blood monitoring
 - **Benzodiazepines** – Combining with cannabis can dangerously suppress breathing and motor function
 - **Antidepressants or antipsychotics** – Cannabis can alter blood levels and amplify side effects
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What You Should Do

If you're using cannabis—or thinking about it—**talk to your doctor or mental health provider right away**. Do not stop or adjust your medications without guidance, and never assume cannabis is “safe” just because it is legal or prescribed medically in some states. Especially when being treated for a behavioral health condition, using cannabis is not safe. When speaking to your provider, your provider can:

- Explain the specific risks based on your medication and diagnosis
 - Help you stop using cannabis safely if needed
 - Adjust your treatment and monitor for dangerous interactions
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Final Message: Protect Your Mental and Physical Health

Mixing cannabis with mental health medications **is not safe**. It puts you at risk for **serious psychiatric and medical complications**. What feels like temporary relief can make your condition worse, harder to treat, or even lead to life-threatening emergencies.

Your safety and stability matter. There are safer and more effective ways to feel better—and your healthcare team is here to help.

If you are experiencing a mental health concern, do not hesitate to reach out. Henderson Behavioral Health is here to help. Call us at 954-530-0714. For mental health emergencies, call 988 now.