Your CBD Questions, Answered

Thousands of cannabidiol (CBD) products are now available to the average consumer, some of them online, others at dispensaries that have cropped up all over town. However, despite this popularity, CBD remains a mystery for the average consumer.

- How does it work?
- Are there side effects?
- What are the benefits of CBD?
- Is it legal?

“CBD is everywhere,” Denise Vidot, Ph.D., an assistant professor at the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies, acknowledges. “But most people don’t understand what they’re buying. It’s very important for the consumer to have some health literacy in this area. Not all products are the same.”

What’s more, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not regulate over-the-counter CBD. In the current climate, this means the best approach may be *caveat emptor* or buyer beware.

With that in mind, here’s a handy primer if you’re considering CBD edibles, oils, or ointments.

What is CBD?

CBD is a compound found mostly in the flowers and leaves of the hemp plant. It is NOT marijuana, though hemp and marijuana could be considered cousins. CBD sold over the counter cannot contain more than 0.3% THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, the
psychoactive component in marijuana. That’s why CBD will not give you a high.

How does CBD work?

An epidemiologist specializing in cannabis use and cardiometabolic disease risk, Dr. Vidot says our body has a complex endocannabinoid system that helps control certain functions, such as appetite, mood, memory, and sleep. CBD binds to the receptors in the central nervous system that express inflammation and pain. THC, on the other hand, binds to receptors in the brain.

What conditions can CBD help?

People use CBD oil or other forms for a variety of reasons. Products appear to ease chronic pain, help with sleeplessness, and tamp down anxiety and depression. However, beware of unproven claims that tout CBD as a treatment for diabetes, cancer, even Alzheimer’s.

What are the types of CBD?

Broadly speaking, there are three. CBD isolate is the purest. It contains only CBD.
Broad-spectrum CBD includes other cannabis plant chemicals but no THC. Full-spectrum CBD has THC.

**Does CBD come in different formats?**

Yes, including edibles, oils, ointments, tinctures, and inhalers. It also comes in different dosages. Both factors determine how they affect your body. “Cannabis can be consumed in many forms,” Dr. Vidot explains. “If you smoke it, you’ll feel it within 30 minutes. An edible may take an hour, but it also lasts longer.”

What’s more, reactions are individualized. “Every human is different. You might need a different quantity than someone else to get the same effect,” she adds.

**Is CBD legal?**

On the federal level, CBD is legal across the United States. It must contain no more than .3% THC. The same is true in Florida, which allows the use of medical marijuana. However, medical marijuana, unlike CBD, is tightly regulated. Only physicians who are specially trained and pass an examination can prescribe it for a narrow list of conditions. Patients must apply for a medical marijuana card. Recreational marijuana is not legal in Florida.

It’s important to note that laws governing CBD use can vary from state to state. If you’re traveling, check local laws before packing your CBD-infused gummies or oil.

**Is it safe?**

Usually, but “look for the compounds and additives manufacturers include in a product,” Dr. Vidot says. “That’s why it’s so important to read the ingredients. You
should know what you’re taking.”

Unfortunately, the lack of regulation complicates a consumer’s ability to understand what he’s ingesting. In the past, for example, studies have detected a compound called 5F-ADB in CBD vaping liquids. Usually found in illegal synthetic marijuana, it can trigger adverse effects, like paranoia and panic attacks and has been linked to emergency room admissions, even death. Other labs have discovered pesticides, heavy metals, and microbial contamination — obviously ingredients that would not be listed on a label.

**Are there side effects?**

Yes. Some people report drowsiness, appetite loss, diarrhea, and irritability. Other side effects are more serious. The FDA says some studies suggest CBD products can cause liver injury and may affect fertility in men. The agency also warns again using any cannabis product during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

**How can I ensure a safe experience?**

Ask lots of questions. Do your homework. “I can’t emphasize enough how important it is for an individual to do their research,” Dr. Vidot says. Here are her other suggestions:

- Look for a product that offers a Certificate of Analysis. A COA tells you that an independent, third-party laboratory certified the ingredients. In short, you shouldn’t take any company’s claims at face value. Ask for the COA at your local dispensary. “Use only companies that have their COA and are willing to show you,” she adds.
- Start slow and at the lowest dosage. If it’s not working or as your symptoms
require, you can increase the amount — but do this gradually. “Too much of anything is bad,” Dr. Vidot explains. “So dosing properly and knowing exactly what’s in it is crucial.”

- Keep a journal of what, when, and how much you’re taking. List any side effects or unusual reactions. This will help provide a clearer picture of how, or even if, the CBD product is actually addressing your problem.
- Tell your healthcare provider about your CBD usage. While you don’t need a prescription for OTC gummies, oils, and other forms, cannabis can, and does, interact with other drugs you may be taking.
- Follow medical advice. Visit a physician specifically licensed by the state to prescribe medical marijuana if it’s been recommended. This year, new practice guidelines require doctors to conduct an in-person assessment of patients that includes family and social history, including “an emphasis on substance abuse disorder and mental health.”

For more information, visit the Florida Department of Health.

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