

Cannabis: Medicine or Toxin?

With the increased access to medicinal and recreational cannabis in Portland, it's reasonable to question how cannabis may play a role as a medicinal herb for pets, especially in terms of compassionate care.

However, it is also realistic to expect that many pets will have a higher risk of accidental exposure leading to many more cases of toxicity.

In order to help you make the safest decisions for your pet, we have listed a few facts concerning the history, value, and dangers of cannabis.

- The traditional use of medicinal cannabis for people dates as far back as 2700BC in the Pen Tsao Ching, the pharmacopeia of Emperor Shen Nung, the father of Traditional Chinese Medicine.
- Cannabis is still classified as a **Schedule I controlled substance** making it illegal for veterinarians to prescribe the use of it. This is also why there is very little research on the medicinal value in animals.
- The medicinal properties of cannabis are thought to be derived from cannabinoids. The most well-known and studied are THC, known for its psychoactive properties and CBD, known to be non-psychoactive but also having medicinal properties.
- Dogs and humans are very different in how their cannabinoid receptors are located and distributed in the brain. This may account for why dogs have a much different reaction to cannabis exposure than people do.
- Signs of toxicity in dogs include incoordination, drooling, and loss of bladder control. In rare but severe cases dogs may become comatose or go into cardiac arrest.
- These signs of toxicity are caused by THC, not the other cannabinoids.
- Edible sources of cannabis are especially dangerous due to their tastiness and potency. This danger is greatly intensified if they contain chocolate or the sweetener xylitol, which are also toxic to dogs.
- Industrial hemp used for commercial purposes such as cloth manufacture and rope has insignificant amounts of the psychoactive THC (less than 0.3%) but large amounts of other cannabinoids like CBDs that possess medicinal benefit. As we learn more about medicinal cannabis for animals, this may be a legal product that has some promise.
- It has been argued that the cannabis used traditionally in many cultures more closely resembled the cannabis used for industrial hemp than the highly bred modern THC-packed cannabis used for recreation.
- Please consult with one of our doctors before experimenting on your own. With our background in herbal medicine, acupuncture and chiropractic we can evaluate your pet and discuss the best options for keeping your pet comfortable and happy.
- Please keep all cannabis products safely contained and out of reach of your pets and children.