

Starting university brings a mix of excitement and challenges, especially during Freshers Week when students are settling into new routines and juggling health needs alongside social life. For students who use cannabis for medical reasons, understanding the difference between **lawful prescription** and **possession without prescription** is vital. This guide not only staying within the law but also navigating university rules and healthcare systems smoothly.

In this guide, we'll break down the legal risks tied to prescribed and street cannabis for students, how registering with a GP early can save headaches, the Pharmacy-first approach for common conditions, how prescription charges and exemptions work, and smart ways to avoid overpaying with the NHS Low Income Scheme and Prepayment Certificates. Plus, we'll highlight what you need to know about your university's disciplinary rules around cannabis possession and use.



Understanding the Legal Landscape: Lawful Prescription vs Possession Without Prescription

Since November 2018, cannabis-based products became legal in the UK **only** if prescribed by a specialist doctor. This means carrying or using prescribed cannabis for a medical condition is legal but comes with strict criteria and paperwork. Anything else — particularly street cannabis — remains illegal under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

- **Prescribed cannabis** refers to cannabis-based medicines dispensed via the NHS or private prescriptions.
- **Street cannabis** is cannabis obtained without prescription from non-medical sources and is illegal to possess, sell, or use.

Legal risks for students:

- Possession without lawful prescription can lead to arrest, prosecution, and a criminal record.
- Some universities treat possession/use of street cannabis as a disciplinary offence, possibly resulting in suspension or expulsion, even if police aren't involved.

- Carrying prescribed cannabis abroad or even in some UK settings may involve additional legal complexities; always check location-specific laws.

University Disciplinary Rules: More Than Just the Law

Universities have their own codes of conduct, which often have stricter rules about drug use than the criminal law. For example, even if a student has a prescription, the university might require strict storage protocols or disclosures to medical staff. On the flip side, possession of street cannabis can lead to warnings, fines, or expulsion, heavily impacting your academic trajectory.

Tip: Review your university's drug policy early in term (typically week one or two) so you know what is expected and what is off-limits.

GP Registration During Freshers Week: Why It Matters for Cannabis Users

Week 1 at university — often chaotic for many — is the best time to register with a local GP near your term-time address. Being on a GP list locally ensures easier access to prescriptions, medical advice, and repeat prescriptions. This is especially crucial for those relying on prescribed cannabis-based products.

- Register with your university-area GP as soon as possible during Freshers Week.
- Bring past medical records and prescriptions from your home doctor to ease the transfer.
- If prescribed cannabis, inform the GP about your need so they can liaise with specialists for ongoing care.

Why the rush? Many practices operate on a first-come-first-served basis for new registrations and may pause registrations after the initial weeks once their capacity is reached. Signing up early saves delays that could interrupt your lawful access to cannabis medicines.



For more student-specific advice and updates, keep an eye on Facebook student groups and Twitter hashtags like #StudentHealth and #FreshersWeek.

Pharmacy-First Care: Managing Common Conditions without Extra GP Pressure

Pharmacists in the UK now offer a "Pharmacy First" service where they can help diagnose and treat common conditions such as cold sores, hay fever, and minor infections — sometimes without needing a GP appointment. This is useful if you want to avoid overburdening GP services during busy university term and if your cannabis prescription does not cover other ailments.

- Visit a local pharmacy for minor aches, infections, or advice.
- Pharmacists can supply some medications directly under NHS schemes.
- This frees up your GP to focus on ongoing prescriptions and specialist referrals, including necessary cannabis prescriptions.

Note:

Pharmacy First is great for minor health issues but not a substitute for specialist care or urgent medical attention related to your cannabis prescription or other serious health matters.

Prescription Charges, Exemptions, and Avoiding Overpaying

Many students worry about prescription costs, especially if they need regular cannabis medication, which can be pricey privately and limited on the NHS.

Prescription Charge Status Who Qualifies? Details Free Under 16, 16–18 in full-time education, pregnant or with low income Valid exemption certificates needed Standard Charge Most adults aged 19–60 without exemptions Currently £9.65 per item (check current fees) NHS Low Income Scheme Low-income earners/pensioners Can reduce or eliminate prescription charges

Note: Prescription charges apply per item, so multiple prescriptions can add up quickly.

How to avoid overpaying

1. Check if you qualify for free prescriptions before purchasing. Many students qualify because of full-time education status or income level.
2. Apply for an NHS Low Income Scheme certificate if you expect repeated prescriptions and have limited income.
3. Consider a Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC) if you'll need 3 or more prescription items in 3 months, or 12 or more in 12 months — it caps your total cost and can save money over time.
4. Keep track of your medications and when to renew; missing the timing could lead to avoidable emergency costs or overpayments.

NHS Low Income Scheme and Prepayment Certificate Math: A Simple Check

If you pay for prescriptions regularly, a quick calculation can tell you if a Prepayment Certificate or the Low Income Scheme saves money.

Scenario Cost Without PPC Cost With PPC Which is Cheaper? 3 items in 3 months $3 \times £9.65 = £28.95$ 3-month PPC = £30.25 Without PPC by ~£1.30 4 items in 3 months $4 \times £9.65 = £38.60$ 3-month PPC = £30.25 With PPC saves ~£8.35 12 items in 12 months $12 \times £9.65 = £115.80$ 12-month PPC = £108.10 With PPC saves ~£7.70

Make sure to education.clickdo.co consider your total number of prescription items over the period you'll need medicines. Many students underestimate this during early weeks of term.

Key Takeaways: Staying Safe and Legal with Cannabis at University

- **Register with your GP promptly during Freshers Week** to secure lawful prescriptions and ongoing care.
- **Do not possess or use street cannabis.** It is illegal and risks serious legal and university disciplinary consequences.
- **Understand your university's disciplinary rules** about cannabis possession and usage; being caught can affect your academic career even without criminal prosecution.
- **Use Pharmacy First services** for minor illnesses to avoid overloading GP services unnecessarily.
- **Check your eligibility for prescription charge exemptions** and make smart use of NHS Low Income Scheme certificates and Prepayment Certificates to manage costs.
- **Stay informed.** Social media channels like Facebook student groups and Twitter offer up-to-date info and peer advice on health and legal issues.

Final Words

Being a student is demanding enough without accidentally falling into legal or financial traps related to prescribed cannabis. A little preparation during Freshers Week — from GP registration to understanding prescription systems — goes a long way in keeping you safe, healthy, and focused on your studies instead of last-minute crises.

For ongoing updates, follow relevant health authorities and your university's wellbeing team on social media and don't hesitate to ask your GP or pharmacist for clarifications. Your health and academic success are worth the effort.