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As the interest in medicinal cannabis grows, many families and adults in London wonder how much private prescriptions for this treatment run—especially for conditions like epilepsy or autism-related symptoms. This article breaks down the typical **medicine recurring cost, initial assessments**, and ongoing **follow-up appointments** you can expect, while clarifying what the NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) currently recommends, what it does not, and why that matters.

## Important Context: Autism vs. Co-Occurring Conditions

Before discussing costs and access, it's critical to understand a common misconception: **medical cannabis is not approved to treat autism itself**. Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition defined by differences in social communication and behavior. However, individuals with autism often experience co-occurring conditions such as anxiety, sleep difficulties, or challenging behavior.

Private clinics sometimes promote cannabis products as treatments for autism, but **this is a major red flag**. Any claim about treating 'autism' directly should be scrutinized carefully. Instead, medicinal cannabis may sometimes be prescribed to address specific symptoms like epilepsy or seizures, severe anxiety, or chronic pain — symptoms which sometimes co-occur with autism but are distinct in their own right.



## NICE Guidance and Medical Cannabis

The NICE guidance library provides up-to-date, evidence-based advice on medicines and treatments. As of now, NICE **does not recommend medicinal cannabis for autism or its core symptoms**. Its recommendations focus on thorough clinical evaluation for other conditions where cannabis might have a more established role.

The regulatory standards overseen by the GMC (General Medical Council) require doctors to base private prescriptions on robust evidence and clear clinical need. This means cases where cannabis is prescribed should be carefully selected and documented, following well-established guidance rather than marketing hype or anecdotal reports.

# Narrow Epilepsy Indications Supported by NICE

One of the few scenarios where cannabis-derived medicines have NICE backing is for rare, severe epilepsy types:

- **Dravet syndrome**
- **Lennox-Gastaut syndrome**

Both are forms of epilepsy that start in early childhood and can be drug-resistant. For these conditions, the cannabis-derived medicine *Epidyolex* (cannabidiol) is licensed and NICE recommends it as an adjunctive therapy if standard anticonvulsant drugs fail to provide sufficient control.

Even here, the use is narrowly defined and must be carefully managed, with clear clinical assessments and monitoring.

## Understanding the Evidence Limits and Placebo Effects

It's vital to be transparent about the *state of current evidence* around medical cannabis:

- Many studies are small or observational, with mixed results.
- The placebo effect—improvements linked to patient expectation rather than the drug—can be significant.
- High-quality randomized controlled trials (RCTs) on autism core symptoms or broader epilepsy types are lacking.

This explains why the NHS, guided by NICE, remains cautious about prescribing cannabis widely and instead prioritizes robust clinical research and safety.

## Costs of Private Medical Cannabis in London Over One Year

When families and patients turn to **private clinics in London** for medical cannabis prescriptions, understanding the full financial commitment over a year is crucial. Costs break down into three main categories:

1. Initial assessment
2. Medicine recurring cost
3. Follow-up appointments

### 1. Initial Assessment

The initial consultation with a specialist private prescriber often includes:

- Full medical history review
- Discussion of previous treatments and response
- Explanation of potential benefits, risks, and alternatives
- Arrangements for cannabis prescription if deemed appropriate

This assessment alone typically costs between **£250 and £450** in London clinics. Some providers may charge extra if more extensive diagnostics or reports are required.

### 2. Medicine Recurring Cost

Medical cannabis products in the UK are pharmaceutical-grade but still relatively expensive compared to standard medicines. The price depends on:

- The specific cannabis formulation (e.g., cannabidiol only vs. combined THC/CBD products)
- Dosage prescribed
- Frequency of use

As a rough indicative range:

Type of Product Typical Monthly Medicine Cost Annual Medicine Cost Estimate Cannabidiol-only formulations (e.g., Epidyolex for epilepsy) £300 – £600 £3,600 – £7,200 THC/CBD combination products £400 – £800+ £4,800 – £9,600+

It's important to note that these prices reflect the medicine itself only and do not include pharmacy dispensing fees, customs/handling, or potential VAT costs.

### 3. Follow-Up Appointments

Ongoing clinical monitoring is standard, to assess treatment response, side effects, and dosage adjustments. Private clinics usually schedule follow-ups every 1 to 3 months, involving:

- Symptom tracking and documentation
- Physical examination if appropriate
- Prescription renewal and adjustment discussions

The typical cost for a follow-up visit is around **£150 to £250** per appointment.



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Assuming four to six follow-ups in a year, this adds approximately **£600 to £1,500** to annual costs.

## Summary Cost Table for One Year

|              |                     |                    |           |                         |                |                                     |             |                                |                        |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Cost Element | Estimated Range (£) | Initial Assessment | 250 – 450 | Medicine Recurring Cost | 3,600 – 9,600+ | Follow-Up Appointments (4-6 visits) | 600 – 1,500 | <b>Total Estimate Per Year</b> | <b>4,450 – 11,550+</b> |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|

*Note:* Individual costs vary based on dosage, condition treated, clinic fees, and clinical complexity.

# Key Questions to Ask Before Starting Private Medical Cannabis

1. Is the product being prescribed for a well-recognized, licensed indication? (e.g., Dravet syndrome, Lennox-Gastaut syndrome)
2. What evidence supports this use according to NICE guidance?
3. How will treatment efficacy and side effects be measured objectively?
4. What is the full breakdown of all costs including prescription, dispensing, clinic visits, and potential tests?
5. Is the prescriber registered with the GMC and experienced in cannabis prescribing?

## Why the NHS Position Matters

For many families, the annual private cost may be prohibitive. The NHS, advised by NICE, continues to fund medicinal cannabis only in specific epilepsy cases and generally not for autism or broader neurological or psychiatric conditions due to insufficient clinical evidence and safety data.

This is not because of stigma but reflects a commitment to evidence-based, cost-effective healthcare. Patients should be aware that "seems calmer" type outcomes without objective measures are **not enough** to justify wide prescribing or high patient expenses.

## Conclusion

In summary, the cost of private medical cannabis over one year in London can range widely but often exceeds £4,000 annually when considering initial assessment, monthly medicine costs, and follow-up appointments. Families should carefully evaluate:

- Whether their condition fits NICE-approved indications
- The robustness of evidence supporting treatment
- A clear monitoring plan for outcomes
- All associated costs before committing

Consulting with GMC-registered specialists and referring to the NICE guidance library can help ensure safe, rational decisions about medical cannabis use—avoiding unproven claims and unexpected financial burden.

Ultimately, while private prescriptions offer access outside the NHS, understanding the complexities of autism vs co-occurring conditions, epilepsy indications, and evidence limits is key to making informed healthcare choices.

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