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Marijuana: A guide to quitting

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Publication Details

Grenyer, B. F. S., Solowij, N. & Peters, R. (1996). *Marijuana: A guide to quitting*. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

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Keywords

guide, quitting, marijuana:

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Grenyer, B. F. S., Solowij, N. & Peters, R. (1996). Marijuana: A guide to quitting. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

MARIJUANA – A Guide to Quitting

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(A more recent Quit manual is available in pdf at <http://www.edas.org.au/docs/cannabis.pdf>)

This information is designed to assist those people who wish to quit using cannabis and require help to do so. It takes you through the steps involved in:

Making a DECISION to quit

The PROCESS of GIVING UP

Keeping your LIFE FREE of CANNABIS

"What hashish gives with one hand it takes away with the other: that is to say, it gives the power of imagination and takes away the ability to profit by it." Baudelaire (1860)

Taking action to quit cannabis use

This guide is aimed at assisting people who are seriously considering quitting the use of cannabis and need some help to do so.

About Cannabis

Cannabis is the general name given to a variety of preparations derived from the plant *Cannabis sativa*. Other names include marijuana, grass, dope, pot, weed, mull, hash, hash oil etc. The main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis is delta-9-tetrahydro-cannabinol or THC. There are also 400 other chemicals in the cannabis plant.

How does THC affect me?

When cannabis is smoked THC rapidly enters the bloodstream through the walls of the lungs and is taken to the brain. THC is stored in fatty tissues and can be detected in urine for days, weeks or sometimes months. The effects of cannabis vary depending on the person, the environment and the potency of the drug, and also depend on how long you've been using the drug. Contrary to some viewpoints, it is possible to become addicted to cannabis and feel dependent on it to get through the day. Each year thousands of people seek help to stop using marijuana. People get to a point in their lives when they feel it is time to change.

Why do I smoke dope?

There are many reasons why people smoke cannabis. It is helpful if we try to identify your reasons for getting stoned. This will give you an idea of how to achieve a similar result through other activities when you stop.

For example, some people smoke to help them relax. There are many other ways of relaxing without smoking, like meditation and bushwalking. Others smoke to enhance conversation and social interactions, but many find that after several years of smoking the quality of relationships and social life in general can deteriorate

Another reason for smoking is to avoid having to deal with life's problems. However, the problems just don't seem to go away by themselves. In the space provided try to identify your reasons for getting stoned. Be specific, but don't try to narrow it down to one reason only.

WHY I SMOKE CANNABIS:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Why Give Up?

There are many reasons for giving up. The following have been identified by users, ex-users, researchers and health professionals. These include health reasons, social reasons, legal and financial reasons. Examine these reasons and decide how relevant they are to you.

Health risks

Research shows that the long-term use of cannabis leads to:

- Respiratory diseases such as chronic bronchitis.
- Changes to cells in the body which may signal the development of cancer. Cannabis smoke contains substantially higher levels of cancer-causing chemicals than tobacco smoke.
- Problems with attention, concentration and memory which get worse with continued use of cannabis and only partially improve upon quitting.

Other possible problems include:

- An increased risk of developing cancers in the mouth, throat and lung.
- An increased risk of birth defects or leukemia in children exposed to cannabis during pregnancy. It may also disrupt sperm production and ovulation.
- Poor educational achievement and difficulties in learning.
- An increase in symptoms of illness in persons who suffer from heart disease, asthma, bronchitis, emphysema or schizophrenia.

Identify the health consequences of cannabis use which present the most cause for concern to you:

HEALTH FEARS:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Social reasons for quitting

Some people want to give up because they are tired with their current lifestyle and feel they are stagnating.

Does the following apply to you?

- I am worried that my social life is becoming restricted to only dope smokers.
- I have been feeling low and have been avoiding people.
- My relationships with some people are not going well.
- I am upset by arguments and conflict between my partner and me.
- My partner is concerned about my smoking.
- I have been worried about smoking around children.

Many people use cannabis to avoid dealing with these problems. Often such problems just continue to get worse. Your decision to quit might make some problems seem worse in the short-term, but you will end up feeling much better about yourself and your life in the long run. Remember:

"no pain, no gain".

Adding up the cost:

Are you concerned about the amount of money you are spending on cannabis? Complete the table below and calculate what getting stoned is costing you per year.

Cannabis (e.g. leaf, heads, hash)

\$ _____ per week x 52 OR \$ _____ per month x 12

TOTAL COST PER YEAR \$ _____

You might want to consider the costs of tobacco, papers, bongs and munchies as well. Maybe days off work too. It all adds up.

Other hassles about cannabis...

We have talked about how cannabis can affect your health, social life and pocket. What about these other hassles?

Do these worry you?

- Feeling addicted or not being able to control my use of cannabis
- Feeling anxious and paranoid
- Feeling like my thoughts are always racing except when I'm stoned
- Having trouble sleeping properly
- Not doing my job properly anymore
- Taking risks driving when stoned
- Wasting time trying to score
- The risks involved in growing my own
- Getting busted by the cops
- Arrests, fines, court hearings, possible criminal record and other legal hassles.

How do I give up?

Most people who are successful in giving up do so "cold turkey". That is, they simply stop using one day and don't go back to it. Some people try to give up gradually by cutting back on their use. This can sometimes work but it can also prolong the agony. People who cut down sometimes rapidly return to heavy use. If you are serious about quitting, the best way is usually to simply stop. You might be pleasantly surprised that it's easier than you thought. Soon after quitting you will find that your thinking starts to become clearer.

In order to quit using cannabis you have to confront your own desire to get stoned. You will essentially be going into battle against a part of yourself that you no longer wish to exist. Giving up cannabis, especially if you have been using regularly for some time, is a bit like losing an old friend. But giving up should not feel like a funeral, but a beginning of your new life.

Do not get upset about quitting – think of it as a positive step for the better. For this reason you must be well prepared and have a plan worked out well in advance. If you follow some of the steps suggested in this guide you will find it easier to achieve your goal. If you are serious about stopping, it is now time to decide when you are going to quit.

A CONTRACT WITH MYSELF

I *promise*

THAT I SHALL

QUIT

Using *cannabis*

On

.....

DATE

.....

SIGNED

"Our greatest victories and those which are most enduring are our victories over ourselves"

Napoleon

My decision

Set a date which you designate as Quit Day. Give yourself at least one week of preparation before Quit Day. Remember that the decision is yours and the commitment you make to quit cannabis is with yourself. It is a good idea to sign and date a contract with yourself now. You might like to consider making other changes at this time, like quitting cigarettes as well.

Strategies to help me quit

We discussed at the start of this guide why you get stoned. Now try to think of some things that you can do that you know will help you when you give up.

3 THINGS I CAN DO STRAIGHT AWAY

TO HELP ME GIVE UP:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Changing my old habits

When you use cannabis you are establishing a link between the situation and getting stoned. This means that certain situations, people and places, which were present on a number of occasions when you smoked may, in the future, trigger your desire to get stoned. In the space provided list the places where you usually get stoned, other persons present, your mood just prior to getting stoned. This need not be based on your memory of previous sessions. It might be useful for you to keep a diary like this right up until you decide to quit. A final item you can include, is a possible substitute for getting stoned that is appropriate for the situation.

WHERE	WHO WITH	MOOD	SUBSTITUTE
Eg. Loungeroom	Alone	Down	Go for a surf

The following strategies may prove useful to you in quitting.

1. **Set a DATE *and* STICK to it.**
2. **REPLACE DOPE *with* NEW ACTIVITIES *and* INTERESTS.**
3. **AVOID SITUATIONS WHERE YOU *used to get stoned*.**
4. **YOU *do not* HAVE TO *go it alone*.**
5. **ASK A FRIEND FOR SUPPORT.**
6. **SAY TO OTHERS: "I DON'T GET STONED ANYMORE!"**

From the previous illustration you should be able to identify a number of strategies you can use to help you quit, especially in the initial stages. All of these may be useful at some stage or another.

A check of my feelings

On the day that you give up, and for a week or more after, some people can feel out of sorts. There are a number of "withdrawal symptoms" caused by stopping regular use of cannabis. These are some of the things you might experience:

- Anxiety
- Moodiness
- Irritability
- Tremors
- Perspiration
- Nausea
- Sleep disturbances.

These are a normal part of giving up. Your body is flushing out the cannabis toxins. Take it easy, stay with your resolve to quit, and these feelings and problems will soon go away.

How do I stay off?

Once you have set a date and you have made the initial steps toward quitting, you will experience times when you want to break your contract. Falling back into your old habits is one reason why people fail in their attempts to quit. It may be helpful for you to alter your lifestyle to accommodate the new you without cannabis.

AVOID SITUATIONS WHERE YOU USED TO GET STONED:

Lifestyle changes

It is often useful to make other changes to your lifestyle in order to be successful in quitting cannabis. Think about what you are going to say to your old friends that you used to smoke with. It might be helpful to practice saying things like "I don't smoke anymore" or "I've given up dope". Change your diet to include healthier food. Set new routines – like increasing exercise. If stress is a major issue for you then learn stress management techniques other than getting stoned, or do your best to avoid stressful situations. Work hard to improve your relationships. Make efforts to meet new people. Try to find new meaning in your life without cannabis.

Anger and Frustration

Anger and frustration can lead to strong urges to get stoned. When you feel impulsive and frustrated try not to get overwhelmed by urges to smoke (eg. "I would die for a bong"). It is helpful to focus on understanding the feelings until the craving passes. Every craving you survive puts you closer to your ultimate long term goal.

Avoidance

Avoid situations that are likely to cause you to relapse. For example, if going to parties where people smoke is going to be difficult, try avoiding parties for the first couple of months after quitting.

Escape

Take a break from situations where other people are smoking or about to smoke dope. A brief walk or other activity can help you in your quest to give up.

Remind myself why I gave up

It is often a good idea to remind yourself why you gave up. Re-read this guide and think about your reasons for quitting when you feel you might be getting into a situation that might lead you to smoking pot.

Notice how many people don't smoke

Tell yourself frequently that you now choose not to smoke. Think of yourself as a caring and responsible person, and that you do not want to pollute your body or the environment.

Have someone listen

Let someone listen to you when you need to talk about your change in lifestyle without cannabis. Let someone 'reward' you for not smoking.

Cleaning up my life

Remove all the things from your home that remind you of cannabis smoking. Consider how the world around you will be a better place if you don't smoke. Remind yourself that many people have successfully given up and have been able to deal with their problems without cannabis. Be careful not to replace dope with alcohol or lots more cigarettes.

In the space provided try to identify some strategies which may help you to stay off.

STRATEGIES I CAN USE TO STAY OFF CANNABIS:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Lapses

Sometimes you will not be able to fight the urge to get stoned. If you do slip up try not to think of yourself as a failure. Think of it as a lapse in concentration and renew your commitment to quit. It is a good idea to remind yourself that you are confident and capable of not smoking.

Rewarding myself

Now that you have given up, reward yourself in new ways. One good suggestion is to give yourself a gift at the end of each week that you are successful in fulfilling your contract. Try to match the cost of the gift with the average weekly cost of getting stoned which you calculated earlier. You may like to keep a record of this.

Week	Gift	Cost
Eg. Week 1	Movie and dinner for two	\$100

"Desire is the key to motivation, but it's the determination and commitment

to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal that will enable you to attain the success you seek"

Mario Andretti (race car driver)

Quitting cannabis is like learning a new skill. The more effort you put into it the more skilled you become. Apply yourself to the task and you will notice an improvement. If you feel pressured into getting stoned, remind yourself that it was a thing of the past and you no longer need it.

Here are some comments by people who have given up.

- "I gave up because I was in a rut. It was easier than I thought."
- "My friends and work mates have noticed how much happier and positive I am now that I don't smoke."
- "I have more time now to enjoy my friends and family."
- "I have some funny memories about getting stoned. I sometimes miss it but I would not go back to that lifestyle anymore."
- "I hated going out to buy grass, it wasted so much time and money. I don't have to worry about this now."
- "I felt myself getting paranoid and withdrawn every time I had dope. Now I actually talk to people at parties and enjoy getting into conversations."
- "Dope used to be my big excuse for not doing anything in my life. Now I have given up my mind is a lot clearer. I see things in a new way."
- "I am surprisingly more relaxed and peaceful now that I have quit."