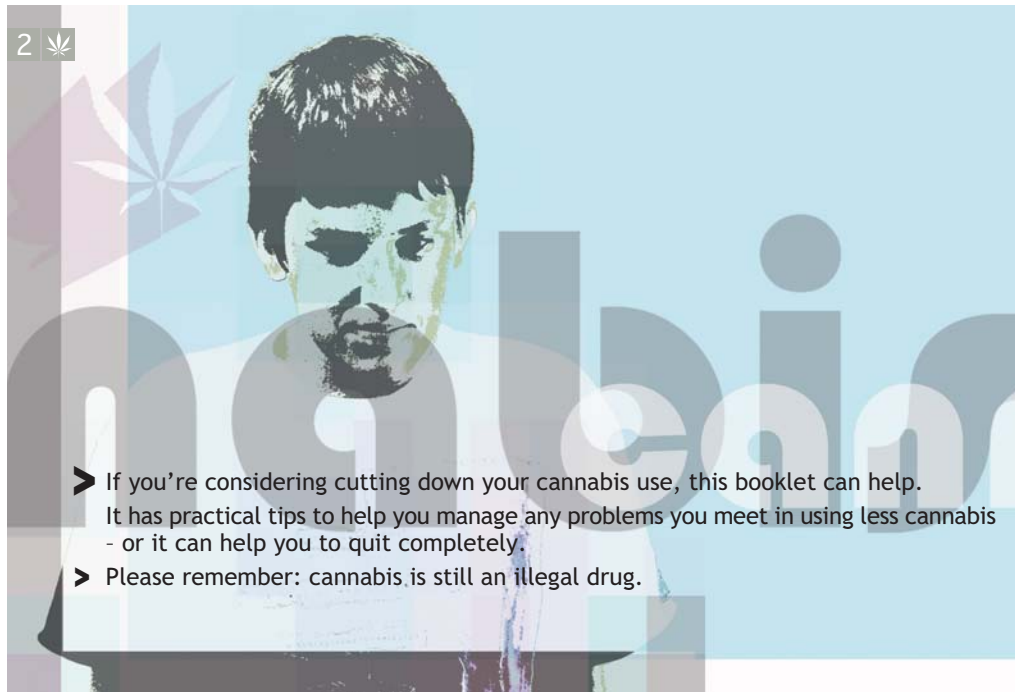


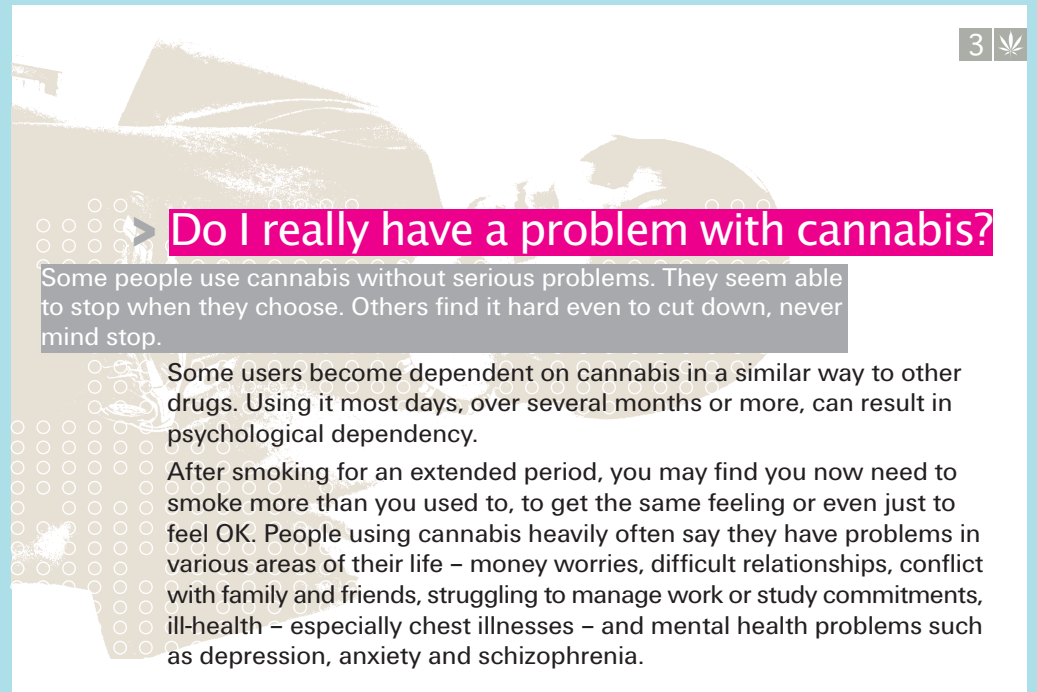


# A GUIDE TO CUTTING DOWN AND STOPPING CANNABIS USE





- If you're considering cutting down your cannabis use, this booklet can help. It has practical tips to help you manage any problems you meet in using less cannabis - or it can help you to quit completely.
- Please remember: cannabis is still an illegal drug.



## ➤ Do I really have a problem with cannabis?

Some people use cannabis without serious problems. They seem able to stop when they choose. Others find it hard even to cut down, never mind stop.

Some users become dependent on cannabis in a similar way to other drugs. Using it most days, over several months or more, can result in psychological dependency.

After smoking for an extended period, you may find you now need to smoke more than you used to, to get the same feeling or even just to feel OK. People using cannabis heavily often say they have problems in various areas of their life – money worries, difficult relationships, conflict with family and friends, struggling to manage work or study commitments, ill-health – especially chest illnesses – and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia.



## > Are you saying I'm dependent?

In general, the symptoms of dependence are:

- > Using more, or for longer, than you meant to
- > A constant desire to use, or trying to give it up and failing
- > Spending a lot of time getting supplies, using and recovering
- > Spending less time on important activities or giving them up altogether
- > Keeping on using, even when you know it's harming you
- > Tolerance (needing more of the drug to get the same effect)
- > Withdrawal (unpleasant symptoms when you stop)

Having one or more of these problems does not prove you are dependent. But, if you are concerned about any of them, you might consider reducing or stopping your use.

### > Want to find out more about your cannabis use?

Go to the Know Cannabis website and do the 5-minute online self-assessment quiz – [www.knowcannabis.org.uk](http://www.knowcannabis.org.uk)

It's confidential – you don't need to give your name or where you live.



## > If you want to cut down or stop your cannabis use, take it a step at a time:

1. Think about changing
2. Plan for the change you want
3. Act on your decision
4. Have a back-up plan

### 1. THINK ABOUT CHANGING

Why do you smoke cannabis? Why do you want to cut down or stop? The first step is to work out your answers to these questions.

Some positive things (pros) about using cannabis might be

- > A sense of well-being
- > Having fun and socialising with friends
- > The feeling of relaxation
- > Time out
- > Increased creativity and enhanced senses
- > It's something you share with your boyfriend, girlfriend or partner



## Short- and long-term problems

Some negative things (cons) about using cannabis might be:

### Short-term

- > Anxiety or paranoia.
- > Memory and concentration problems.
- > Increased risk of accidents – especially if you drink alcohol as well. Don't drive or operate machinery at work when you are stoned.
- > Bizarre thoughts, extreme paranoia or hallucinations. If you or your family have any history of mental illness you are more at risk of experiencing serious problems. Talk to your GP about any psychological and mental health issues.
- > Problems with your employer or the authorities over using an illegal drug.
- > Frequent cannabis use during pregnancy may help cause premature birth. Babies may also temporarily suffer tremor and distress.

### Long-term

- > Increased risk of throat or lung diseases – such as bronchitis and lung, throat or mouth cancers – especially if you also smoke tobacco.
- > Dependence – it makes things worse if you can't do without it.
- > Financial problems – spending more, earning less.
- > Social isolation – long-term smokers often say they don't mix with other people as much as they used to.
- > Less motivation – people dependent on cannabis struggle to achieve their goals and say they regret wasted time and opportunities.
- > Less concentration, less ability to learn or remember things.
- > Existing mental health problems, will be made worse by using cannabis. Cannabis can also trigger serious mental health problems in some people (e.g. people who have had mental health problems before, or who have a history of mental problems in their family such as schizophrenia). See your GP or contact a helpline to discuss any serious mental health worries you have.





# Reasons for changing your cannabis use



RECORD THE PROS AND CONS OF CUTTING DOWN OR STOPPING YOUR CANNABIS USE

Pros of using cannabis



Four horizontal lines for writing pros of using cannabis.

Cons of using cannabis



Four horizontal lines for writing cons of using cannabis.



Pros of cutting down or stopping your cannabis use



Four horizontal lines for writing pros of cutting down or stopping cannabis use.

Cons of cutting down or stopping your cannabis use



Four horizontal lines for writing cons of cutting down or stopping cannabis use.



Compare the pros and cons of using cannabis with the pros and cons of cutting down or stopping. It is up to you to decide whether this is the right time to change your cannabis use. If you are not ready to change now, you can always come back to this booklet at a later date.

10  2. PLAN FOR THE CHANGE YOU WANT

**HOW ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE IT HAPPEN?**

The first thing is to set a date for changing your cannabis use. Record the date in this box.



**These simple tips have helped others to keep to their plan. Tick the ones you are going to use and add your own:**

- Ask a friend or partner to help – tell them your plan and ask for their support
- Reduce your other commitments as much as you can for the first couple of weeks
- Stop and think before you smoke – put it off, go back to your list of reasons to stop, find ways to distract yourself and don't act on your craving
- Remind yourself why you want to change
- Plan ahead – make a list of what you will be doing instead of smoking
- Remind yourself of the benefits of not smoking
- Plan on doing things you enjoy that don't involve smoking
- Avoid high-risk places and people who smoke – see next page
- Become familiar with the tips for coping with cravings – see page 14

*Write your own*

*Write your own*



**WHAT ARE YOUR HIGH-RISK SITUATIONS?**

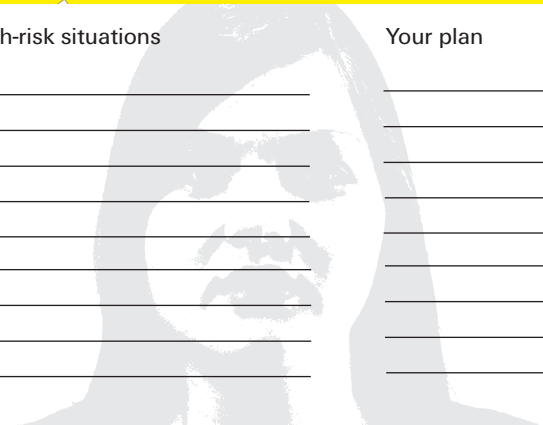
High-risk situations may include seeing someone who supplies you or smokes with you, or finding yourself in a place where you can get or smoke cannabis. These situations act as unconscious triggers.

**Make a list of your high-risk situations and a plan for dealing with them**

Your high-risk situations

Your plan

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____





1. **LEAVE OR CHANGE THE SITUATION** – e.g. for a few weeks avoid friends you smoked with, remove all cannabis-related paraphernalia.
2. **PUT OFF THE DECISION TO SMOKE FOR 15 MINUTES** – a craving is usually time-limited and you can 'ride it out'. Each time you do that, it will be easier next time.
3. **CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT SMOKING** – cannabis is not a 'need' so you can live without it.
4. **DO SOMETHING UNRELATED TO SMOKING** – read a magazine, go for a walk or do something you don't usually do when you smoke.
5. **BE POSITIVE** – remind yourself of your success so far – e.g. "It has been 3 days and every day is a little easier." "I have finally got round to ..." "My partner is really pleased."

**Make sure your plan is realistic – something you can achieve.**

Some people may have begun to use cannabis because their partner did, or carry on using because their partner still does; cannabis can play a large part in some relationships. Try to think about the pros and cons of using cannabis for yourself, and encourage your partner to make their own list. Many people who don't use cannabis still have relationships with cannabis users – splitting up isn't inevitable!



People who have been using cannabis heavily for some time often experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop. The most common symptoms are psychological, such as intense craving and anxiety or depression, but there may be some physical symptoms. They are uncomfortable, but they are not dangerous and will pass.

**Cannabis withdrawal may include feelings of:**

- > Anxiety
- > Depression
- > Anger
- > Confusion
- > Irritability
- > Urge or craving to smoke

**Physical symptoms of cannabis withdrawal may include:**

- > Sleep problems
- > Restlessness
- > Loss of appetite
- > Tremors
- > Night sweats
- > Diarrhoea



## > WITHDRAWAL

Withdrawal symptoms are positive signs. They show that the body is getting used to being cannabis-free again. It is recovering.

The symptoms are short-term: they don't last for long. Most will gradually go away within 7–10 days.

### Coping with cravings

- > **DISTRACTIONS** think about or do something that will take your mind off them
- > **DELAY** if you have an urge to smoke, put it off: the feeling will pass
- > **DON'T PANIC!** it's not the end of the world and no-one has ever died of cannabis withdrawal
- > **DO SOMETHING** to help you relax, e.g. go for a walk, have a warm bath



- > Most of the uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms will come and go, like your urges to smoke. Be patient: they do pass.

During this time, try to eat well and get some exercise, as these will help. While exercise may be difficult, it helps to make sure you get a good sleep. Being tired reduces your resistance to craving.

You may find it helpful to cut down gradually in the week before you decide to stop. This may include delaying the first smoke of the day or reducing the number of joints per day. However, this may not suit everybody.

It helps if you monitor the symptoms: it is very encouraging when you notice that they get less intense as time goes by.





➤ Once you know you really want to cut down or stop and you have decided what your plan will be, review your list of strategies for dealing with high-risk situations and how you will manage withdrawal and craving.

Then put it into action – just do it!

Remember the four Ds: *(see page 14)*

➤ **DISTRACT, DELAY, DON'T PANIC AND DO SOMETHING**

Have a plan that works for you for each of these.



Look back at your 'Plan for the change you want' on page 10 and make sure you have followed as many of the tips as possible. Here are some more things to consider:

- > **GIVING IN TO TEMPTATION:** Sometimes our minds try to trick us into having a smoke by rationalisations such as 'Just one smoke – I deserve it', 'It's a special occasion' and so on. Make a firm, positive statement to yourself: 'There are going to be no exceptions, I've decided to change and I'm determined to succeed'.
- > **GRIEF REACTION:** Many people giving up drugs feel as if they have lost a good friend. It may feel like this to you, but such feelings do pass.
- > **REVIEW YOUR PROGRESS:** At the end of every successful week, you should reward yourself (not with a joint!) for a job well done.

➤ If you have had a lapse, don't beat yourself up or think you're a failure. It is not a major crisis and you can learn from it. Why not go back to your reasons for changing your cannabis use (pages 8 & 9) and see if they need revising? Work out what went wrong (such as a high-risk situation that you weren't prepared for) and how to deal with the situation next time: e.g. "I went to John's place where everyone was stoned and, before I knew it, I had a spliff in my hand".

**Some solutions might be:**

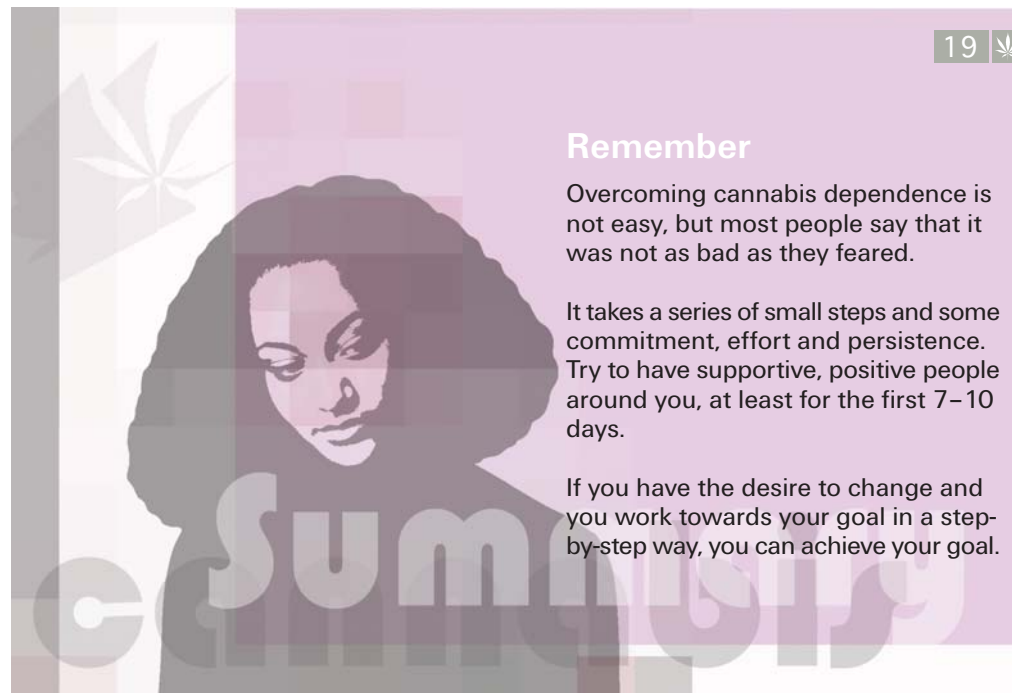
- (a) work out why I ended up at John's place when I know he is a heavy smoker;
- (b) practise delaying and distracting when I see John;
- (c) avoid John!

### Remember

Overcoming cannabis dependence is not easy, but most people say that it was not as bad as they feared.

It takes a series of small steps and some commitment, effort and persistence. Try to have supportive, positive people around you, at least for the first 7–10 days.

If you have the desire to change and you work towards your goal in a step-by-step way, you can achieve your goal.



## > Further advice and help

Go to the Know Cannabis website – [www.knowcannabis.org.uk](http://www.knowcannabis.org.uk)

As well as the 5-minute self-assessment quiz, there's also a self-help programme that can help you cut down or stop your cannabis use. It's confidential – you don't need to give your name or details about where you live.

Call the FRANK helpline on 0800 77 66 00

To get confidential information and advice about any illegal drug, FRANK will also provide details of organisations offering practical help and support in your area.

The NHS Smoking Helpline: 0800 169 0 169



**FRANK**  
0800 77 66 00 [talktofrank.com](http://talktofrank.com)  
Friendly, confidential drugs advice



© 2004 HIT UK Ltd.  
All rights reserved.



With thanks to NDARC, Sydney