

EFFECTIVE WEED CONTROL

A guide for people trying to cut down or stop using cannabis



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Alcohol & Drug Centre

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This self-help guide is for people who are having problems with their cannabis use and want to do something about it. The book is designed for people who want to cut down on their smoking or stop smoking altogether.

Like all self-help books, it's important not just to read, but to use this book in a more interactive way. Discuss your opinions with a friend and let others who are prepared to support you read the guide. Write in the spaces provided - the planning and relapse prevention exercises, the cannabis use record - and make this book your own.

The exercises will help you to keep a record of your progress while trying to achieve the goals you have set for yourself. There is information for your friends and family who are supporting you during this time and a list of contact details at the back of the book.

Most importantly, put your plans and goals into action and keep a positive attitude about the changes you want to make to your life.

ABOUT CANNABIS

WHAT IS CANNABIS?

Choof, mull, weed, ganja, dope, hooch, pot, grass, hash, skunk, dakka...whatever. It all comes from a plant called cannabis sativa, and at various times in history, has been grown all over the world. When cultivated for its strong fibres, it is usually known as hemp and is used for making clothing, rope and paper products. When grown for its mind-altering or psychoactive effects, most people would know it as marijuana — Mexican for cannabis.

How it works

There are over 400 active chemicals in cannabis. The main psychoactive component is known as delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). When cannabis is smoked or eaten, the THC is absorbed into your bloodstream and pumped to your brain. Once there, the THC attaches itself to specific cannabinoid receptors, resulting in effects on brain function.

These cannabinoid receptors are not designed so that we can smoke cannabis and get stoned. They are there to support two chemicals similar to THC that the body produces naturally. Just why the body makes these chemicals and what useful function they serve is still being investigated, however it is thought they play a role in pain control, mood and appetite.

Getting rid of it

THC and its by-products are dissolved in fat and may remain in the body's fatty tissues for long periods of time, until they are released back into the bloodstream and excreted via urine. Because of its slow release, traces of THC can be detected in the body for several weeks or even months depending on the level of cannabis used.

How strong is it?

Cannabis is a weed that can be grown in a variety of conditions, however, its strength depends on its growing environment and the part of the plant which is consumed. Different parts of the plant have different concentrations, as do different cannabis products, such as hashish and hash oil which are derived from the resin of the plant and generally have a higher concentration of THC than raw plant material.

THC concentrations are highest in the female plant towards the end of its flowering cycle. The flowers or 'heads' are the most potent part of the plant.

Improved growing and hydro-technology, as well as selective cross-breeding of higher quality seeds which leads to more plant hybrids, may have increased the strength of cannabis in recent years, although this is still widely debated.

Tolerance and dependence

Tolerance is when your body has grown used to THC, which means you have to progressively smoke more and more to feel the effects of cannabis. You can reduce tolerance by taking breaks for one or more days in between smoking. This will decrease your risk of becoming dependent on cannabis as well as the risk of experiencing health and psychological problems.

The bonus of taking a break is that you will need less cannabis to get stoned on the days when you do smoke. In addition to tolerance, dependence on cannabis involves cravings and mild physical withdrawal symptoms such as insomnia, agitation, irritability, depression, tremors,

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headaches, nausea, chills and sweating. Withdrawal symptoms may occur when the amount of cannabis used is reduced or ceased.

Am I dependent?

Evidence suggests that regular heavy users can develop a tolerance to the effects of cannabis and may experience a range of withdrawal symptoms when they reduce or stop smoking. In the past, cannabis was thought of as a drug without a risk of dependence, and as such, the existence of dependence had not been studied in detail or treated as a syndrome. Dependence on cannabis is characterised by frequent use, increased tolerance, withdrawal symptoms and an inability to control use despite experiencing negative consequences in everyday life.

When thinking about your own cannabis use, you may wish to consider the following:

- Do I tell myself I can stop smoking any time I want, even though I keep getting stoned when I don't really want to?
- Have I ever decided to stop smoking for a week or even a few days or a few hours, only to break my promise to myself?
- Have I ever switched from cannabis to another drug, such as alcohol, thinking this will help me get control of my smoking?
- Have I had any problems connected with smoking over the past few months? e.g. health, relationship, financial, family problems.

WHAT'S IT DOING TO MY MIND AND BODY?

Cannabis use, particularly if heavy or prolonged, can affect many different aspects of your physical and mental health.

The respiratory system (breathing)

Smoking cannabis is particularly bad for the respiratory system. Long-term use can lead to shortness of breath as well as chronic coughing and wheezing. It also increases the risk of cancer of the tongue, mouth, throat and lungs in later life.

It is not just cannabis that is damaging but also tobacco, herbal cigarettes and herbal teas used in mixes. The chemical composition of both tobacco and cannabis smoke is very similar; however, it is thought that a lot more tar is inhaled when smoking cannabis as compared to smoking tailor-made cigarettes.

Some people believe that smoking cannabis on its own is much more 'healthy' than smoking tobacco. However, due to the way cannabis is smoked - hard inhalation and holding smoke in the lungs longer than a cigarette - damage to the respiratory system can be much more profound. Sharing bongs is also a common way of spreading colds, flu and other diseases which may affect your respiratory system.

The immune system and disease

Long-term cannabis use can reduce the performance of the immune system, which increases the chance of catching a cold or flu. This effect may only be temporary, and the immune system should regain strength once cannabis use is stopped.

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Studies have shown that cannabis smoke can also cause changes to cells (mutations) which may lead to cancer. It is likely that cannabis smoke does cause cancer, for the same reasons that cigarette smoke does, not because it contains cannabinoids. If long-term cannabis smoking causes cancer it is most likely to develop in the areas that receive maximum exposure, such as the lungs, throat, mouth and tongue.

The cardiovascular system (heart and blood vessels)

There is insufficient evidence to conclude that using cannabis causes permanent harmful effects to the cardiovascular system. However, given that it does cause changes in heart rate (between 20 and 50 per cent), lowers blood pressure, plus decreases the flow of oxygen to the heart, it is recommended that people with blood pressure problems or heart disease decrease or stop smoking cannabis.

Reproduction

The long-term effects of cannabis on reproduction have not been studied widely, but there is evidence to suggest that it may lower sex drive, lower sperm count and increase the proportion of defective sperm. Cannabis may also lead to menstrual problems and irregular periods, making family planning and contraception difficult.

Pregnancy and breast feeding

Women who use cannabis while they are pregnant are at risk of having premature or low-birth weight babies for the same reason as women who smoke tobacco — a lack of oxygen to the unborn child. This risk is increased if cannabis is mixed with tobacco.

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Some research has suggested that cannabis use during pregnancy may be linked to an increased chance of birth defects or childhood leukaemia. Other reports don't support this, but as THC is known to cross the placenta barrier, it would be wise to avoid using cannabis in pregnancy until its effects are better understood.

THC can also be found in breast milk and its effects on infants are not clear. Some research indicates that cannabis may cause sleepiness in babies which can lead to slow weight gain and development overall. The use of cannabis may affect a mother's ability to properly care for her baby, therefore, nursing mothers are advised not to smoke cannabis, or to smoke less.

Concentration and memory

Long-term heavy use of cannabis impacts on short-term memory, attention and concentration, making it difficult for some people to remember what they have just done or what they were just talking about. This can lead to problems in regard to working, studying and other activities which rely heavily on your ability to think clearly and utilise your memory.

These effects appear to be subtle, and mostly involve complex thought processes and skills. It is unclear how this affects everyday functioning. Whether or not these deficits improve when a person stops using cannabis is not known. The effects tend to be related to how long a person has been smoking and are more likely to linger on if you've been smoking for many years. Cannabis does not, however, lead to severe brain damage, as is observed in the long-term heavy use of alcohol.

Motivation

Some heavy cannabis users report a decreased level of motivation and a deterioration in social skills and concentration. This has been termed 'amotivational syndrome' by some researchers and is generally thought of as a reduction in the energy or motivation for physical activity and an increase in difficulty in concentrating on demanding tasks. It has never been clearly proven if such a syndrome truly exists, although the smoker would be the best judge of that. Lack of motivation is however, a common theme when talking to people who smoke cannabis heavily.

Psychological health

The effect of cannabis use on mental health is the focus of many studies. There is evidence to suggest that heavy use of cannabis is a cause of psychosis and can exacerbate schizophrenia. While it is unclear if cannabis actually triggers this disease, it is considered likely to affect people who have a family history of schizophrenia or a predisposition to psychosis. Given that cannabis does alter mood and feeling, long-term heavy use could possibly have a negative effect on mental health. This is a particular risk for people who have already had a mental health problem before they started using cannabis, e.g. depression, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (manic depression).

High risk groups

There are groups of people who have an increased risk of experiencing adverse effects from their cannabis use.

These people include:

- Adolescents smoking significant amounts of cannabis.

ABOUT CANNABIS

This group may experience delays in educational and occupational achievement which may impact on choices and options in later life.

- Women who are pregnant, planning to get pregnant or breast feeding. Women who smoke cannabis during pregnancy may increase the risk of having a low birth weight baby. Nursing mothers may have babies who are slow to develop.
- People who have pre-existing health problems such as heart disease, asthma, bronchitis, emphysema or cancer.
- People who have psychiatric disorders. Research suggests cannabis use increases the risk of experiencing psychotic symptoms such as seeing or hearing things that aren't there, believing things that aren't true, and having disordered, scattered and confused thoughts. People who may be more vulnerable are those with a personal or family history of such disorders.
- People who are dependent on other drugs. The use of multiple drugs is known to increase risks such as overdose, violent and aggressive behaviour, unsafe sex and unwanted pregnancies, and an increase in health problems (including mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, paranoia) and negative side effects.

WEED CONTROL

THE PROS AND CONS OF CANNABIS USE

In the early days, when you first started smoking cannabis, you probably found that it had a lot of positive effects. You may have felt happy and relaxed, laughed a lot, enjoyed a book, music, movie or tv show more than usual, or felt creative and inspired in your thinking.

However, over time, you may have found that cannabis no longer provides as many positive feelings and experiences, and that some negative effects have begun to appear. For example, perhaps smoking cannabis initially helped to manage anxious feelings or block out depressing thoughts, but over time it has made your anxiety and depression worse.

One reason why some people find it difficult to reduce or stop smoking cannabis (or using any drug), is that even after making the decision to stop they still miss the good things about it. These positive traits should not be ignored and are often the reasons why you started smoking in the first place. The trick is to find alternative activities which also make you feel good.

Use the 'PROS' and 'CONS' table on the next page to make a list of the positives of smoking cannabis and the things you find pleasurable about getting stoned, then write down the negative aspects of smoking. Reminding yourself of these pros and cons and weighing up both sides of the story may influence your decision to stop or cut back on your use.

SETTING GOALS AND LIMITS

Setting goals and limits to manage your cannabis use is the basis of effective weed control. It's important to keep a few things in mind when setting goals and making plans you intend to stick to.

- Be clear about what you're aiming for: to reduce your smoking or to stop smoking altogether.
- Be realistic and specific about what you want to achieve, write it down and read it often.
- Don't be afraid to put numbers or dates on things; i.e. cutting back from 1/2 to a 1/4 ounce per week, or only spending a set amount on cannabis per week.
- Think about what (or who) might make it difficult for you to stick to your plan, and about what (or who) might help you stay on track.

Use the list on page 20 to write down your goals. By doing this, you can identify exactly what it is you hope to achieve.

Achieving your goal

Once you have decided the course of action you wish to take with your smoking, come up with some personal rules that can help you achieve your goals.

For example:

- 'I won't smoke before 8 pm'
- 'I won't buy a deal until all my bills are paid'

It is important not only to make your rules realistic and achievable, but also stringent enough to work. You could also make a more detailed plan. Reducing or controlling

WEED CONTROL

cannabis use is often harder than stopping altogether and may require an initial period of abstinence.

Some stricter controls may be needed in order to establish new patterns of use. For example:

- 'I will only smoke on Friday and Saturday nights between 8-10 pm.
- 'I will only buy weed once a month.

MY LONG TERM GOAL IS:

I WILL ACHIEVE THIS GOAL BY:

How much and how often do I plan to smoke? For example, I will only smoke on Friday/Saturday nights 8-10 pm

Will I cut down gradually or on a particular day? Be specific

What other steps can I take to reach my goal?

What (or who) might make it difficult for me to stick to these plans?

How will I overcome these obstacles?

KEEPING A CANNABIS RECORD

It is important to keep a record of how much you are smoking if you want to reduce your intake. At the back of this booklet, you will find a cannabis use record which will enable you to keep track of your smoking for a week at a time.

Use it to write down your daily use, the amount and frequency you smoke, the circumstances under which you smoke and where and when cannabis is used. Using the record will help you identify your smoking habits and assist in setting and achieving both short term and longer-term goals.

IDENTIFYING RISKY SITUATIONS

Cannabis consumption is often linked to particular situations, moods, routines or company. You may have felt a certain way or found yourself in an uncomfortable situation and you smoked cannabis to help you get through it. Identifying these feelings and situations will help you not to rely on cannabis (or other substances) as a way of dealing with what's going on in your life.

What are your risky situations? They could include feeling stressed or tired after work and wanting to relax and unwind, sitting around the house on a weekend bored or hanging out with a group of friends who all smoke. Use the examples on the next page to identify a risky situation and a way you might deal with it instead of reaching for the bong.

HANDLING RISKY SITUATIONS

Negative emotional state (feeling bad, bored or depressed)

Your own example.....

What can I do instead of using drugs?.....

Positive emotional state (feeling good, celebrations, socialising)

Your own example.....

What can I do instead of using drugs?.....

Negative physical state (tiredness, physical pain)

Your own example.....

What can I do instead of using drugs?.....

Social pressure to smoke (from friends or family)

Your own example.....

What can I do instead of using drugs?.....

Interpersonal conflict (arguments with others, feeling stressed)

Your own example.....

What can I do instead of using drugs?.....

Having access to money or cannabis

Your own example.....

What can I do instead of using drugs?.....

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

A contingency plan helps you to deal with risky situations before they occur. Think about the situations in which cannabis might be offered to you and the people who might be involved, and plan your response to refuse these offers.

Tips for responding to offers of cannabis might include practising responses or planning to remove yourself from locations associated with cannabis use:

- Saying 'I don't feel like it today', 'I'm trying to give up' or 'Thanks but no thanks'.
- Remembering that depending on whether you want to cut down or give up smoking completely, answers such as 'Not today' may leave the option open for future offers.
- Answering in a clear, firm voice without hesitation.
- Making direct eye contact.
- Asking your friends to stop offering you cannabis and that you will let them know if and when you want to smoke.
- Not being afraid to set limits.
- Remembering the difference between assertive, passive and aggressive responses.
- Not feeling guilty about refusing cannabis.
- Remembering strategies to remove yourself from risky situations, e.g. "I won't go home with ' _____ ' after drinks on Friday night" or "When ' _____ ' brings out the bong, I'll go home".

WEED CONTROL

When you feel like smoking or find yourself in a situation where it would be tempting to smoke, remember the rules you have made for yourself. For example:

- 'I won't smoke when I feel depressed'
- 'I won't smoke when I'm bored'
- 'I won't smoke out of habit'
- 'I won't smoke to block out, forget or put off my problems'

or

- 'I will only smoke at a set time'
- 'I will only buy weed once a month'
- 'When I've smoked the last of my weed, that's it for today/this week/this month'

It is also important to have supporters in place who can help remind you of the reasons why you have chosen to reduce or stop smoking. They can be of great assistance during the difficult early stages of withdrawal, lending support (or providing you with a distraction) to help you achieve your goals.

Think about a contingency plan that works for you and write it down on the next page.

HANDLING URGES AND CRAVINGS

When making the decision to reduce or stop smoking, you may see benefits in stopping but at the same time miss the positive aspects of cannabis. These positives may be linked to activities, situations, people and the effects that come from smoking itself.

The cravings that arise with reduced use are commonplace and will vary in intensity. They can be likened to waves in the ocean, which start off as a small swell, grow in size, break and then ripple away to nothing.

The three D's

Although strong at the time, cravings are temporary and do pass, becoming more manageable as time goes on.

There are ways for you to manage cravings, using the concept of the three D's — delay, distract and decide.

When confronted with the decision about whether to smoke or not, delay making that decision for perhaps an hour, during which time most urges and cravings will have come and gone.

Developing activities that distract you from the urge to smoke is the best way to delay your decision. Once you are engaged in a distraction or an absorbing activity, it is usual for the cravings to fade away.

Decide all over again to stay committed to your goal. Read your 'CONS' list on page 17 and congratulate yourself on not giving in to the cravings. Reward yourself with something healthy and know that the next time you get a craving to smoke, it will be less intense and you can manage it.

WEED CONTROL

In order for change to occur, you should aim to spend less time with smoking friends and remove yourself from the activities associated with cannabis use. Although difficult, this modification of lifestyle is necessary if the longer term goal of reducing or stopping smoking is to be achieved.

GETTING SUPPORT

It is often helpful to let a supportive person know what you are doing and enlist their help, encouragement and understanding of the problems you may be experiencing. Write down the names and contact numbers of people who will be your support network in the spaces provided on page 51. If you prefer not to let others know what you are going through, you may find mixing with non-smokers is supportive in itself.

Support and counselling is available from a range of services (see Useful Contacts on page 52). Phone DirectLine on 1800 888 236 for telephone counselling and/or suggestions for services that can help.

Sometimes letting fellow smokers know that you are trying to cut down can also reduce tempting situations. Some friends will encourage you, but be prepared for others who may not be as enthusiastic about it as you are.

Stay positive and stick to your plan. By controlling your use you will find:

- Your tolerance to cannabis decreases
- You won't spend as much money
- You are likely to have a much clearer head

REWARDING YOURSELF

It is important to reward yourself for achieving positive changes, no matter how small the change is.

You may find that you can now afford to treat yourself with some of the money you have saved from cutting down on your cannabis intake. In order for rewards to provide immediate encouragement and a 'feel good' effect, it is probably best to spoil yourself pretty much straight away. Alternatively, you could watch your bank balance grow to save for something big like a holiday or a car or to pay off the debts to your dope dealer!

GETTING THROUGH WITHDRAWAL

WHAT IS WITHDRAWAL?

If you use drugs regularly or for a long period of time, your brain chemistry changes in an effort to adapt to the drug. When you stop or decrease your drug use, it takes a while to re-establish normal functioning and this period is known as withdrawal.

The symptoms and severity of cannabis withdrawal vary from person to person. Some people don't experience withdrawal at all, whilst others experience extreme symptoms. Withdrawal can be a time when mental health problems surface as a consequence of your cannabis use.

Common cannabis withdrawal symptoms are:

- Anger, aggression, irritability
- Anxiety/nervousness
- Decreased appetite or weight loss
- Restlessness
- Sleep difficulties including strange dreams

Less common symptoms include:

- Chills
- Depressed mood
- Stomach pain/physical discomfort
- Shakiness
- Sweating

GETTING THROUGH WITHDRAWAL

Symptoms usually begin within 1-2 days after your last smoke, peak at days 2-6 and subside until most symptoms disappear by weeks 2-3.

Some people report that sleep difficulties and irritability can last even longer. It's a good idea to see a doctor if you are worried about your health and wellbeing.

LIFE WITHOUT SMOKING

Smoking cannabis can unexpectedly become a major part of your life. When you make important changes to your habits and routine, you can be left with a sense of loss and feel as if something is missing.

For some people, reducing or stopping their smoking means spending less time with certain friends and missing out on activities associated with smoking, such as listening to music, watching movies, or going to parties. Some smokers may also feel like they have lost a crutch that has helped them cope temporarily with the difficulties of life.

Filling these gaps is hard work, but by adopting action strategies and taking up alternative activities to smoking, you can help to fill the void that may arise when you cut back or stop using cannabis.

Action strategies

One important factor that allows you to manage your withdrawal is knowing what to expect. Here are some action strategies that may be helpful in getting through withdrawal:

- Keep occupied — plan activities and distractions.
- Eat a healthy diet to assist with a general state of well being.
- Exercise to expend energy, improve sleep patterns, relieve boredom, speed up your metabolism to excrete toxins faster, change your state of mind, provide a 'natural high' and distract yourself from cravings.
- Increase your water intake to assist your body in flushing out the toxins and rehydrating cells.
- Sleep — see the hints for better sleep on page 37.
- Obtain support from others who will be there for you in difficult moments, and avoid people who may make things hard for you.
- Undertake counselling — DirectLine is a 24-hour telephone service that offers support and referral to available treatment services.
- Try complementary therapies to enhance general wellbeing, assist in relaxation and help manage agitation, anxiety, irritability and moodiness. Massage, yoga, meditation, acupuncture, spas/saunas/baths, aromatherapy, tissue salts and herbal teas such as chamomile, valerian, sleepy time and bach flower remedies may help improve your state of mind.

Getting active without weed

Try to plan activities that will help distract you when you have a strong urge to smoke and assist you in managing risky situations. Think about things that allow you to experience the positive aspects of smoking. These might include activities that increase relaxation, decrease stress, allow you some time to yourself and activate your thinking.

Taking on something new and letting go of familiar habits can be uncomfortable and awkward. Changing behaviour takes time, determination, planning and creativity. Change is a process, not an event.

Some activities will be spontaneous, instant fixes. For example, if smoking cannabis relaxes you and helps you wind down at the end of the day, alternatives could be to walk the dog, swim, do yoga or meditation, join a gym, catch up with a friend or cook. You could take some time out to read, write a diary or letter, listen to music or have a bath with aromatherapy oils.

Other activities may need some forward planning to become part of your lifestyle and help you work towards your goals. For example, you could join a club or team, train for a sport, learn an instrument, study, develop art and craft interests, go on fishing or camping trips or travel. Be mindful that some of these activities may be things you enjoyed doing when you were stoned but remind yourself that they can be just as fun and relaxing without cannabis as long as you keep a positive attitude. Use the activity planner on page 36 to write down your ideas.

MANAGING RELAPSE

A lapse is defined as a 'slip up' - smoking cannabis once you have decided to stop or smoking more frequently than you planned. A lapse does not necessarily lead to a relapse, which happens when you return to smoking cannabis after a period of non-use.

Ask yourself:

- Why did I start smoking again? What was the risky situation?
- What would I have preferred to do in that situation?
- Do I need to change my strategies and my goals?

It's a good idea to review the factors that lead to the lapse. Go over your notes on identifying risky situations, as well as your contingency plan.

It's easy to blame a lapse (or relapse) on causes that seem out of your control. However, lapses occur due to factors that can be controlled through your increased awareness and planning. Remember that you always have a choice whether to smoke cannabis or not.

Don't be too hard on yourself if you do slip up. It may happen from time and time and you can learn from it.

Challenging unhelpful thoughts

Unhelpful thoughts often come to mind when you notice your mood is changing, you're beginning to feel stressed, anxious or run down and you're starting to crave a smoke.

You might have a lapse and think: "I've blown it now, so I may as well keep smoking". Negative thoughts like these give you

GETTING THROUGH WITHDRAWAL

permission to fall back into your old habits of thinking and behaving, the very habits you are trying to change.

On the other hand, if you are prepared for these unhelpful thoughts, you can challenge them when they occur by thinking more positively and optimistically.

1. Practice a relaxation technique such as deep breathing to switch off your thoughts and concentrate on the moment.
2. Remind yourself that everyone has a slip-up. You haven't failed completely, you are not a loser and you are not back at square one.
3. If you notice you are 'breaking the rule', try to think more helpful thoughts (use the following examples as a guide).

Unhelpful thought: "I've blown it now, so I may as well keep smoking."

More helpful thought: "I've just had a slip-up and I can get back on track."

Unhelpful thought: "I knew I wouldn't be able to stop."

More helpful thought: "I have been able to make changes... this mistake won't put me off... I need to keep on trying."

Unhelpful thought: "Obviously none of this therapy has worked so why should I bother?"

More helpful thought: "This is only a change in my mood... I can handle this... this feeling will pass... I don't have to act on my craving."

ACTIVITY PLANNER

Instead of smoking cannabis I will:

What can I do to improve or add pleasure to my lifestyle?

What is something I want to do but never get around to doing?

HINTS FOR BETTER SLEEP

Poor or disturbed sleep is a common cannabis withdrawal symptom. Below are some strategies to assist with better sleep.

- Only lie down to sleep when you are actually sleepy. For some people this means going to bed a lot later than usual.
- Do not use your bed for anything except sleeping and sex. Try not to watch television, eat, read or worry in bed. If you do find reading helps you fall asleep, feel free to break this rule and read in bed, but try not to do it for any longer than 20 minutes.
- Follow the 30 minute rule. If you do not fall asleep within 30 minutes, get up, go to another room and do something that is not too stimulating, such as reading or watching television. Stay up as long as you wish and then return to your bedroom to sleep. The goal is to associate your bed with falling asleep quickly. Do this as often as is necessary until you fall asleep within 30 minutes of going to bed.
- If you wake up often in the middle of the night, do not look at your clock to find out what time it is, as this may cause you to worry about not getting enough sleep. If you are unable to get back to sleep after waking, get up and go into another room to watch television or read until you feel sleepy again.
- Develop regular habits. Get up at the same time every morning, regardless of how long you have slept. This will help your body develop a regular sleep rhythm.
- Do not nap during the day as this can cause restless sleep at night.
- Take up some form of relaxation. While partaking in a

GETTING THROUGH WITHDRAWAL

relaxing activity during the day, make sure you don't fall asleep. While partaking in a relaxing activity at bedtime, try to fall asleep in your bed. Relaxation methods such as breathing exercises can be particularly useful for people who wake during the night and have trouble falling asleep again, or for people who are light sleepers. Relaxation CDs can also be helpful.

- Exercise during the day as it can help you fall asleep faster and awaken less often during the night.
- Don't worry in bed. Most of the thinking and worrying that we do in bed needs to be done at some point – just not when we're about to go to sleep. Take time earlier in the day for worrying and thinking. Then if the thoughts return when you are in bed, say to yourself; "I have thought about this today and there is nothing I can do now. I'll think about it tomorrow, as now is the time to sleep!" Some people find it helpful to get up and write their thoughts down to get them out of their head.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine or cigarettes late at night and cut down on your caffeine consumption during the day. Alcohol can make you sleepy but it can also have a waking effect after several hours, resulting in a poor night's sleep. Hot drinks such as chamomile, valerian tea, or warm milk at night can help you feel sleepy.

REDUCING HARM

REDUCING CANNABIS-RELATED HARM

This section is about keeping your body as healthy as possible if you choose to continue to smoke cannabis. It is important to bear in mind that cannabis can potentially affect your mental health as well as your physical health. Paranoia, anxiety and panic attacks can affect first-time and long-term smokers, although more subtle effects such as memory and concentration problems are more common.

If you experience serious problems, it is a good idea to stop using cannabis altogether, and if symptoms persist, you should see your general practitioner or get in contact with your local alcohol and drug agency.

The following tips aim to minimise some of the more common harms.

CUTTING DOWN USE

A simple strategy to reduce harm is to decrease the amount or frequency of your cannabis use.

- Don't make huge mixes as you are likely to smoke it all
- Don't use the party cone, stick to a smaller one
- Don't enter into long sessions with heavy smokers
- Think about your long-term cannabis use goals

Allocate rations

Sticking to an allocated ration may seem ridiculous when you have just scored, but this is the perfect time to set some rules for yourself. Measure out amounts of cannabis and place the portions in envelopes, labelling them with the days of the week you intend to use each portion. If you find yourself dipping into the next day's ration, remind yourself

REDUCING HARM

of some of your reasons for cutting down by writing them on your ration envelopes.

Pace yourself

Be clear about the number of bong/joints you want to have on any given day or decide on your pace and stick to it. You may decide for example to have one bong hourly between 8 pm and midnight.

A good way to keep track of your intake is to enter your smoking sessions on the cannabis use record on page 53.

Keep occupied

Hanging out in your smoking environment can be a powerful trigger for cravings to smoke. It is important to keep occupied during the times you have decided not to smoke. Getting out and doing things you enjoy with non-smoking friends and family will make your days and nights off much more meaningful than simply thinking of it as a time when you can't smoke. Planning your activities in advance will also help.

Joints, spliffs, scoobs, numbers, reefers

Joints allow for control over your level of use. The less papers used in making a joint the better, as this reduces the burnable products. Hemp papers or papers with reduced chemicals are available at bong shops. US research has found that using cigarette filters in joints reduces the amount of THC by about 60 per cent, meaning that you would have to smoke twice as much cannabis to achieve the same effect as an unfiltered joint.

Cigarette filters also increase the ratio of tar to THC. Joint tips or roaches don't actually filter the smoke, they just put

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some distance between the burning end of the joint and your lips. Using roaches reduces wastage as the discarded butt is all cardboard. Joint tips should be made from plain cardboard, as shiny or printed card can release harmful chemicals.

Bongs, pipes, cones, billies

Bongs are a popular way to smoke and allow for easy rationing. Research suggests however, that using a bong causes the most harm to your body. Pulling cones forces an intense rush of smoke deep into the lungs, increasing the surface area that may be affected by carcinogens and tar. When pulling cones (or joints), avoid holding the smoke in your lungs for a long time. Most THC is absorbed into the bloodstream within a few seconds, so holding your breath will only increase the amount of tar absorbed. Also, beware of sucking bong water into your lungs. Make sure there is plenty of distance between the mouth of the bong and the water level (20 cm or more). Suck slowly on the bong, as pulling a fast cone releases less THC than a slow cone.

Bong construction is also crucial. Bongs made from plastic bottles, rubber, PVC and plastic hose with aluminium or foil cones emit harmful fumes when heated. A quick home made bong might be okay for emergencies but if you care about your lungs, use glass, ceramic, wood, stainless steel or brass bongs and pipes. Double or triple chamber bongs remove more water-soluble carcinogens and tar and further cool the smoke.

Beware of germs transmitted from one mouth to another when using communal bongs and joints. Hepatitis A, colds and flu and herpes can be transmitted by sharing bongs. Create your own 'bongdom' using a piece of cloth or tissue over the mouth of the bong, or use your hands to ensure

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your mouth doesn't come into contact with the bong top.

Regular bong maintenance is also important for removing germs and ensuring the cleanest possible smoke. When the water in your bong starts to turn tea-coloured, replace it. Avoid powerful chemical cleaners when washing your bong. Hot water, a bottle brush, mild detergent or a citrus based cleaner are your best bet.

Vaporisers

Vaporisers are possibly the holy grail of smoking equipment. The cannabis is heated rather than burnt, and harmful toxins and tars are trapped in the vaporiser bowl and not passed into the airways, however, it is not clear how much THC is lost during this process. Vaporisers are not widely available in Australia, although some bong shops do sell them. Ordering via the internet may be an option.

Looking after your lungs

When mulling up, discard seeds and stems as they contain no THC, are harsh on the throat and can cause headaches. Leaf contains less THC than bud, meaning you need to smoke more to get stoned, increasing the likelihood of damage to your airways.

Tobacco is a powerfully addictive drug in its own right, and although it can add a stimulant effect to your mix, it increases the amount of tar and carcinogens in the smoke. It is a good idea to keep an eye on your cigarette/cannabis ratio. It should be one gram to one cigarette or less.

Mulling up with something other than tobacco, such as herbal teas or herbal cigarettes may not be any better. Remember anything burnt and inhaled may damage your lungs.

Reducing risk of accidents

Avoid mixing cannabis with other drugs or alcohol. Polydrug use can vastly increase intoxication, which may lead to unwanted effects such as vomiting, disorientation, blackouts and overdose.

Being stoned can affect your ability to concentrate, cause confusion and affect motor co-ordination. Perceptual difficulties, such as misjudging distance and speed may also occur. It is very risky (as well as illegal) to drive a vehicle or operate machinery when under the influence of cannabis.

Cooking and eating

Eating cannabis eliminates the damage to the nose, throat and lungs that occurs with smoking, and is probably the safest method of consumption. Remember that when eating cannabis, the stoned effect can take a while to come on (1-3 hours) and tends to creep up on you. Unlike the rush you get from smoking, patience is required. The effects are generally more intense and last a lot longer — anywhere from 4-12 hours or longer, so it may require some planning.

Labelling cannabis-laced food is a good idea to avoid accidentally dosing your grandma!

CAUTION: Recipes that use cannabis can be extremely potent, even when using leaf. This is important to remember if you are trying to cut down on your intake or you have experienced negative affects from your smoking such as paranoia or hallucinations.

CANNABIS BUTTER RECIPE

This recipe needs to be prepared ahead of time. The butter can be used for toast, cakes, cookies, etc.

Ingredients

5 cups of water

100 grams of chopped leaf (don't use the big leaves)

2 cups of butter

Method

- In a pan bring the ingredients to the boil. Cover and simmer for 2-3 hours
- Strain, keeping all the liquid
- Press the leftovers through a strainer, getting all the liquid out
- Pour one or two cups of boiling water through the strained leaf to get all the THC out.
- Press through a strainer again.
- Cool the liquid, then put it in the fridge
- The butter will harden on top of the water. Keep the butter, disposing of all the water
- Refrigerate the butter in a labelled container

GETTING HELP

COUNSELLING

You probably have your own ideas about what counselling is. There may be a lot of things that have happened to you in the past that you feel you need some kind of counselling for. Counselling during withdrawal is aimed at helping you get through this period and then looking at what you want to do next.

In general, it is recommended that you don't get straight into what has happened to you in the past, nor try to work out your personal relationships or family problems whilst you are going through withdrawal. The reason for this is that working through these sorts of issues can often be emotionally painful and cause a lot of anxiety. You're dealing with enough already and opening a 'can of worms' during withdrawal is likely to make you want to go and smoke and put your withdrawal program in jeopardy.

Often people aren't thinking too clearly during withdrawal if they're experiencing mood swings, poor sleep and difficulty concentrating. There isn't much point in trying to work out what's really bothering you while you are feeling irritable, agitated, tired and run down.

Deal with one thing at a time — first get through the withdrawal. Then, when you are feeling better physically and mentally and you're not craving cannabis as much, you can choose to deal with other matters.

You can try to withdraw from cannabis on your own, without talking to anyone, and with no support or advice, but you may be making it harder for yourself. Your doctor or health worker can help you come up with a plan. Similarly, counsellors from DirectLine and other telephone helpline services across Australia can make a difference.

GETTING HELP

If you can talk openly with your GP about your withdrawal, it might be time to consider a referral to an alcohol and drug service that offers withdrawal assistance as well as ongoing counselling and support. The withdrawal symptoms may be hard to deal with at the moment, but they will not go on forever. Consultation with a naturopath, homeopath or herbalist can help determine the most beneficial natural remedies for your symptoms if you do not want to go to a doctor.

CANNABIS TREATMENT

It is becoming more common to find services offering structured programs for people who are wanting to cut down or stop using cannabis. The telephone services listed at the end of this book can direct you to a service that will suit you.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

During your withdrawal, it is extremely beneficial if you have the support of a network of family and friends. Sharing this booklet with people who are prepared to lend their support will enable them to understand what is going on, and how they can be valuable in their support of you.

Notes for supporters

Many people can provide support to a person withdrawing from cannabis. Partners, friends, family members, doctors and counsellors can all play an important role throughout the withdrawal period, providing support and reassurance during this difficult time.

Supporting someone through a drug withdrawal is not always an easy job. There may be occasions when supporters feel unsure of how to help, what to say, what to do

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or what not to do, and where to turn when things aren't going smoothly. There are, however, several important steps to follow.

To start with, become familiar with what happens during cannabis withdrawal. Read this booklet so you are aware of what the person is going through and the things they can be doing to help them to stick to their goal. Someone who is trying to cut down or stop using cannabis may already be aware of what they should be doing, but may find it difficult to remember what that is when they are faced with cravings to smoke. Encourage the person to keep focused, especially when they are going through difficult periods, and help them to recognise successes and rewards.

It is useful to go over the reasons why the person initially decided to stop smoking. At times, they may feel as though they are not coping, and may waver in their willingness to continue. Look again at the 'PROS' and 'CONS' table on page 17. This may help them to be clear on the benefits of returning to their original goal and persevering with their withdrawal. It is also important to look at how far they have already come and to remember that the withdrawal symptoms will pass.

There are times when, as a support person, you may feel frustrated and impatient with the person's progress or lack of it. This is normal. It is important that you have someone to talk to and to get support for yourself. If you are unsure of how to deal with it, get some advice from a confidential drug and alcohol telephone counselling and information service. The phone numbers for these services are on page 52.

CONTACT LIST

List of support people	Contact details

GETTING HELP

CANNABIS USE RECORD

Over the next 7 days, my cannabis use goal is:
 (consider quantity, frequency, time of day)

.....

Day	What did I use? (skunk, black hash, etc.)	How much? Bongs/ Joints	What time of day was it?	Where was I?	Who was I with?	How much did I spend?	Did I stick to my goal or not?	If so, what helped me?	If not, why did I go over my limit?
Monday									
Tuesday									
Wednesday									
Thursday									
Friday									
Saturday									
Sunday									