

workbook

# quitting Cannabis

**ncpic**  
national cannabis  
prevention and  
information centre

6 relapse  
prevention

5 putting it all  
together

4 managing  
withdrawal

3 strategies  
for change

2 preparing  
for change

1 cannabis  
and you

# 1 cannabis and you

**The drug cannabis is known throughout the world and has been used for its sedative properties and ability to induce a sense of well being.**

The main active component of cannabis is THC, or delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol. While cannabis has many unique properties, people can become dependent on the drug and its effects.

This booklet is designed to assist you to change your cannabis dependence and reduce any problems that you may face in this process.

Many people can use cannabis without developing serious problems or dependence and seem to be able to stop easily when they need to. Others find it more difficult to cut down or quit when they want. This is the same as with other drugs or alcohol. It is well known through research that learning certain practical techniques can help people stop or cut down successfully.

This brief guide is designed to give you information and teaches you techniques that will help you deal with cannabis dependence. You will need to read and work through the main points with your clinician. Keep this booklet to help you with the process of changing your cannabis use.

## what is cannabis dependence?

Although the effects of cannabis are unlike those of any other drug, the way in which dependence develops is quite similar. Using heavily (on most days) for a long period of time results in certain physical and psychological changes. You have probably found that the effects of cannabis have become weaker and weaker over time, as you acquired tolerance to its effects. That is, you need more of the drug to get the same effect.

This is due to your body gradually adapting to the effects of cannabis which contributes to physical and psychological dependence.

After some time, you may have found that you need to have a smoke in order to feel OK. When you don't have cannabis in your system you may feel certain unpleasant physical effects – these could be withdrawal symptoms. Such symptoms may indicate that there is some degree of physical dependence.

Some examples of these effects include:

- **restlessness, irritability and anxiety**
- **trouble sleeping or nightmares**
- **perspiration and night sweats**
- **nausea and stomach problems**
- **cravings and recurring thoughts about smoking**

You may also experience certain psychological symptoms after not having a smoke for some time. These symptoms make it very hard to remain abstinent, and often lead people to relapse after a very short time.

Withdrawal symptoms are often the opposite to the usual effects of smoking cannabis.

For example, people use cannabis because they perceive it to be:

- **fun**
- **relaxing and**
- **stimulates the appetite**

Psychological symptoms of withdrawal are often the opposite:

- **feeling anxious**
- **getting stressed**
- **hyped up, and**
- **having no appetite or interest in food**
- **difficulty sleeping**
- **having vivid dreams**

## identifying your level of dependence on cannabis

One of the first things that is useful in overcoming cannabis dependence is to understand the extent of your own dependence. Like other psychological qualities such as stress or depression, level of dependence can be measured along a scale. **The Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS)** can reveal your level of cannabis dependence.

First check your score on the SDS. If you score 3 or more, research indicates that you are cannabis dependent. The higher the score the more severe your dependence, and the harder you might have to work to overcome your cannabis problems. We know that a severe level of dependence will not stop you from overcoming drug dependence if you are motivated and use sensible strategies. It is a good idea to be prepared and learn as much as you can about the nature of your cannabis dependence.

## severity of dependence scale (sds)

Please complete the next 5 questions. They refer to the **last 3 months**.

**Over the last 3 months:**

**1 Did you ever think your use of cannabis was out of control?**

- |                         |                          |   |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Never or almost never   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0 |
| Sometimes               | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| Often                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| Always or nearly always | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |

**2 Did the prospect of missing a smoke make you very anxious or worried?**

- |                         |                          |   |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Never or almost never   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0 |
| Sometimes               | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| Often                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| Always or nearly always | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |

**3 Did you worry about your use of cannabis?**

- |              |                          |   |
|--------------|--------------------------|---|
| Not at all   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0 |
| A little     | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| Quite a lot  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| A great deal | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |

**4 Did you wish you could stop?**

- Never or almost never  0
- Sometimes  1
- Often  2
- Always or nearly always  3

**5 How difficult would you find it to stop or go without?**

- Not difficult  0
- Quite difficult  1
- Very difficult  2
- Impossible  3

Your SDS score is \_\_\_\_\_ /15,

indicating a \_\_\_\_\_ level of dependence

<b>SDS score</b>	<b>dependence rating</b>
0-3	nil or negligible
4-6	mild
7-9	moderate
10-12	substantial
13-15	severe

# 2 preparing for change

## what are your reasons for smoking?

The next step in planning to change is to understand some of the reasons behind your use of cannabis. There may be ‘positive reasons’ and ‘negative reasons’.

Understanding your reasons for using cannabis can also help you to discover the negative aspects of smoking. In other words, you need to become aware of the reasons why you want to change. This will help you to remain focussed and motivated.

## positive things about smoking

Cannabis has many positive and varied effects. These are experienced differently by people. These are all part of feeling stoned. Some of these are listed below:

- **sense of well-being (euphoria)**
- **loss of inhibitions**
- **tendency to talk and laugh more than usual**
- **feelings of relaxation and escape**
- **increased appetite (‘the munchies’)**
- **‘tunnel awareness’ – ability to focus on one thing and ignore others**

Most of these effects feel good and that is the main reason people enjoy having a smoke.

## negative effects of smoking

On the other hand, long-term use can produce a range of negative effects. These include:

### immediate effects:

- **reddened eyes and dry mouth**
- **anxiety and paranoia**
- **poor co-ordination:** this may increase the risk of accidents particularly when combined with alcohol
- **short-term memory loss**

- sometimes people experience **bizarre thoughts, extreme paranoia, or visual/auditory hallucinations**. This is more likely among people with a personal or family history or severe mental illness
- **demotivation**: that is, you stop doing things that you used to do and enjoy

### longer-term effects:

- **increased risk of diseases of the airways** (bronchitis, lung and oral cancers, other respiratory diseases)
- **dependence** which is experienced as difficulty controlling use, tolerance and withdrawal symptoms
- people with cannabis dependence report **changes in motivation** with many long-term smokers finding it hard to achieve their goals and regretting wasted time and opportunities
- **decreased concentration, memory and learning abilities**
- Very heavy cannabis use may affect fertility in males and females and foetal development, similar to tobacco smoking.

Reasons for smoking are different for everyone. Some of your reasons may be listed above. However, there are probably some more that are personal to you. Take a few moments to think of the positive effects that you enjoy from smoking.

Now spend a few moments to think about the negative aspects of smoking. Have a look at your responses on the **Cannabis Problems Questionnaire**, e.g. tending to smoke more on your own than you used to; worried about meeting people you don't know when you are stoned; having arguments about your smoking with your partner. Some of these problems may be actual effects of cannabis (pains in the chest or lungs), or indirect effects on your life (problems in relationships or work).

Now list your own positives and negatives for smoking. Think carefully about the **benefits** of smoking, or 'pros', and then the **problems** or 'cons'.

## pros and cons of smoking

pros		cons	
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
<b>Total</b>		<b>Total</b>	

Most people have a combination of both pros and cons. These might work out to be greater for one side than the other.

## weighing things up

Take a few moments to go back over your pros and cons, and place a rating out of 10 next to each item. Rate each item according to its strength or importance, where 1 is nil and 10 is extreme. A simple example is given below:

### Susan's pros and cons ratings:

pros		cons	
<i>relaxation</i>	7	<i>causing depression</i>	10
<i>socialising</i>	4	<i>lung infections</i>	4
<i>painting</i>	7	<i>expense</i>	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>

Now add up the totals for each side. Which is greater – the pros or the cons? The balance should tip one way or the other. In the above example Susan’s cons for smoking just outweigh her pros.

The greater total is likely to indicate which way you are inclined about change. If the cons are greater than the pros, you are probably clear about wanting to change. If, however, the pros are greater than the cons, you may still be having difficulty in deciding whether or not you really want to change.

If you find that your balance is still in favour of the positive reasons for smoking, you may need to think very carefully about your desire to change.

### what are your reasons for change?

Thinking about your reasons for wanting to change can also help to motivate you to make a decision. You can do the same exercise as above with the question ‘**pros and cons of changing**’. Your reasons for change may not be simply the opposite of your reasons for continuing to smoke.

#### pros and cons of change

cons		pros	
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
	/10		/10
<b>Total</b>		<b>Total</b>	

## situational confidence and personal triggers

The next aspect of your cannabis dependence is to identify those situations that provide the most temptation to use or result in difficulty in controlling use.

These are called **high risk situations**. These include times, places or situations in which you may have typically smoked. When you are in those situations you will probably have an urge to smoke. For example, if you usually smoke with certain friends, whenever you are with these friends you may have an urge to smoke.

**Triggers** are specific feelings or events which prompt strong thoughts about wanting to have a smoke. They can be internal (certain moods or feelings), or external (seeing a good deal of heads, having a few drinks with a friend, watching TV or a particular time of day).

In order to prepare and increase your chances of success, you should think carefully about your 'high risk situations.' Write as many as you can think of in the spaces on pg 10 that are your personal high risk situations.

Here are some examples:

- waking up in the morning and facing a tough day
- arriving home in the evening and wanting to relax
- being bored, angry or worried
- feeling physically tired
- seeing someone smoking and enjoying it
- feeling you need a lift
- being offered a joint or cone

## personal high risk situations and triggers

internal	
<i>e.g. bored, stressed, angry</i>	

external	
<i>e.g. someone offers me a smoke, I get paid, getting home from work</i>	

You are likely to have urges to smoke when you are in a situation where you have often previously smoked. If you can be prepared for them, you will have a greater chance of resisting the temptation they present. We will look at ways of preparing for high risk situations and overcoming urges to smoke further on in this booklet.

# strategies for change

Having looked at some of the issues that are related to your smoking we will now discuss strategies that can help you to change successfully.

As you probably know, changing any behaviour can be difficult, and so it is with cannabis use. In many ways change is like a journey:

- like any journey it requires **preparation**. The longer you take to prepare the more likely you are to reach your destination
- it requires **effort to** be assured of success and the journey can be rewarding in sections and more difficult in others
- there is seldom one reliable map. Sometimes you will have to charter the territory as you go so you need to be **adaptable**
- be clear about your destination i.e. make both short and long term **goals** along the way
- to be successful you will not only need to plan ahead but also to anticipate what you will need in order to arrive at the end point. In changing drug use, most people need a plan which involves preparing **key strategies**
- be aware that **different strategies** will be needed at different times, for example strategies to avoid pitfalls will be different to the strategies needed during rough times
- while at other times, it may be necessary to **develop new strategies** as you go

As you proceed you will find that you are becoming more skilled at selecting the right strategy for each given situation. You will also learn new strategies, depending on what your individual journey requires.

The key points here are to **'be prepared'** and **'plan ahead'**. The next step is to decide what the best strategies for success will be for you.

Every journey starts with the first steps. This helps you to find out your strengths and weaknesses. As you discover them, you will be able to develop ways to deal with them. You will then develop new skills to replace the role you believe cannabis plays in your life.

Think back to the positive things about using you listed earlier as these will need to be addressed in order to change successfully.

For example, if smoking helps you to deal with stress, you will need to develop strategies for stress management and relaxation.

If smoking relieves boredom or helps to overcome depression, you will need to work out ways to overcome or manage these feelings more effectively.

Listed on the following pages are some strategies that are useful to many people who have been successful in quitting cigarette smoking or controlling a drinking problem. Not all of these are useful to everyone – you will need to select ones that are suitable for you.

## getting started

There are many things that you can begin to do that will help you to start your journey towards change. Simple strategies that are known to work for people like yourself who are trying to change their cannabis use include some of the approaches outlined below:

- **before you smoke – think about it – practice distracting and delaying**
- **plan ahead: think about what you will do instead of smoking**
- **remind yourself why you want to change – refer to pg 10**
- **remind yourself of the benefits of not smoking**
- **do pleasurable things that do not involve smoking**
- **ask a friend or relative for help: tell them about your plans and strategies for change**
- **avoid high risk situations and people who smoke – refer to pg 6**
- **practise urge management skills – refer to pg 17**
- **spend more time with people who do not smoke**

## your own strategies:

---

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

6

---

7

---

8

---

9

---

10

---

Use strategies that you know have worked in the past for you.

They may have been successful for you for a while, or they may not have worked. It is important to understand that not all strategies work for everybody. You should choose the ones that will work best for you.

Try combining different strategies for different situations. This will enable you to develop a range of approaches that will help you to meet specific goals, or to deal with high risk situations.

Write down any further strategies that work for you, to complete your personalised list of effective strategies.

---

---

---

---

## planning ahead: dealing with high risk situations

Most cannabis smoking happens without much planning or effort. It is often easier to smoke than it is to avoid it. This means that you must plan well ahead, to make sure you do not wind up in a **high risk situation**.

There are several ways of dealing with high risk situations. One of the best is to try to avoid them, particularly for the first two weeks after your decision to change. Sometimes this will take some forward planning. For example, don't visit friends who you know will be smoking at the time, even if the visit has nothing to do with using cannabis. The temptation is likely to arise, and it can be difficult to deal with in the early stages.

Some situations are unavoidable. These include such things as:

- the time of day (coming home from work)
- certain mood states (such as stress, anxiety or boredom)

Again, you should think ahead so that you have a ready-made plan for dealing with these situations when they arise. For example, boredom can be relieved temporarily by planning short and long activities to do when the feeling strikes.

In the space provided write your preferred strategy for dealing with each high risk situation. There may be more than one. Knowing your high risk situations can help you to get prepared for dealing more effectively with them before they arise.

### dealing with high risk situations

situation	preferred strategy
<p>1 <i>Coming home from work at 6pm</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Go elsewhere from work for a few days</i></li> <li>• <i>Re arrange the furniture in the house</i></li> <li>• <i>Plan something to do as soon as you walk in the door</i></li> </ul>
<p>2</p>	
<p>3</p>	
<p>4</p>	
<p>5</p>	
<p>6</p>	

## personal emergency plan: high risk situation

Here are further examples of how you might deal with a high risk situation:

- **I will leave the situation or environment**
- **I will put off the decision to smoke for 30 minutes.** I will remember that most cravings are time limited and I can wait them out
- **I will change my thoughts about smoking ...** “do I really need a smoke?” I will remind myself that my only true needs are for air, water, food and shelter
- **I will do something unrelated to smoking**
- **I will remind myself of my successes to this point**
- **I will call my list of emergency numbers**

high risk situation	strategy or plan
	<p><i>Remind yourself of reasons for doing this e.g. these are just thoughts, I don't have to act on them</i></p>

## handling urges and cravings

Like almost everyone who has successfully changed, you will probably experience some **urges** or **cravings** to smoke. An urge or craving is a strong desire to use a drug and it rarely lasts for more than about 30-60 minutes at a time. These feelings are uncomfortable, but it is possible to learn to deal with them more effectively. Understanding the nature of urges is the first step in becoming more successful at overcoming them.

Urges are rarely random. They almost always occur in response to some event or in certain situations. Those events or situations are ones that you have somehow associated with smoking cannabis.

Key points to be aware of:

- certain situations or events can trigger thoughts about smoking.
- they help to prepare your mind and body for having a smoke.
- even when you are abstaining, these responses can still be triggered, leaving you feeling uncomfortable. This decreases over time.

Urges develop in heavy users in response to a repeated pattern of smoking in certain situations. Your body thus learns to **expect** THC at certain times, and in response to certain events therefore creating the urge/craving. In other words, cues or triggers can produce responses that help you to handle THC more easily. These triggers help your body to tolerate the effects of the drug. As a general rule, the longer and more heavy the smoking history, the stronger the urges. Over time they will probably become quite strong, and will always be more noticeable when you are attempting to abstain.

It is important to remember that they rarely last for very long and as already stated they **usually last for 30 to 60 minutes**. This is true for everybody, but few smokers ever give themselves the chance to prove it.

Urges usually come and go in waves and so it is important to ride them out. This is called **urge surfing**. Imagine you are a surfer on a board riding a wave – you need to stay on that board and ride that wave until it subsides without falling off. Therefore, if your urges feel intense, try to **distract** yourself for a little while and you will soon notice that the worst part has passed. Each time you overcome a craving, it makes the craving weaker next time, and makes you stronger as your technique for resisting improves.

Another useful strategy is to **avoid** situations associated with strong triggers. If you persist in sitting in front of the TV, with other people around you who are smoking, and other personal cues are nearby, you will only be increasing the strength of these triggers and your urge to smoke.

Urges do go away. They may be very strong, but only for a short while immediately after changing. Knowing that they will weaken will help you to continue to resist the impulses that you will feel, especially in response to your personal triggers.

## own your actions

Cannabis use is repeated so often that it becomes automatic. Getting and smoking cannabis seems to happen without any conscious decision.

There are lots of small steps in the chain of events that can lead to you holding and lighting a smoke.

Some of the obvious ones include:

- **getting out the stash**
- **mulling up**
- **packing a cone or rolling a joint**

But there are lots of little steps that lead up to this point. They may be things like:

- **making time to prepare for having a smoking session**
- **sitting down in a certain room**
- **being in the company of certain people**

In many instances, the chain of events starts hours before you actually have a smoke. Often without thinking about it, many people make seemingly irrelevant decisions that take them along a path that puts them in a high risk situation which invariably leads to smoking. You need to be aware of this and own your actions.

Think about whether you have ever attempted to avoid smoking, only to find that your best intentions came undone and you wound up in a situation where it was impossible to resist.

You may have been tempted by external triggers such as other people or you may have unintentionally exposed yourself to internal triggers, such as boredom or stress, which set off a sequence of events that led to smoking.

Being aware of your actions and decisions is important in order not to repeat them.

Trying to reduce temptations well before cravings grow into high risk situations will help you to maintain your goal.

When making decisions, whether large or small, do the following:

- consider what options you have – distractions
- think ahead to the possible outcomes of each option.  
What positive or negative consequences can you anticipate, and how do they relate to relapse
- select one of the options:  
Choose one that will minimise your relapse risk. If you decide to choose a risky option, plan how to protect yourself while in the high risk situation
- watch for ‘red flag thinking’ – thoughts like ...  
“*I have to ...*” (do something, go somewhere, see someone) or  
“*I can handle ...*” (a certain high risk situation) or  
“*It really doesn’t matter if ...*” (I’ll just have one)

List below any decisions that on the surface appeared to be harmless which led to relapse.

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

Try to think up a few likely decisions that you could imagine yourself making in the future that may lead to relapse.

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

## withdrawal symptoms

Many people are likely to experience some cannabis withdrawal symptoms, while others may have little or no discomfort upon cessation. Often, the psychological symptoms are most difficult. There may, however, be some physical symptoms. These can be uncomfortable but are not dangerous. The main symptoms of cannabis withdrawal involve feelings of:

- **anxiety**
- **depression**
- **anger**
- **confusion**
- **irritability**
- **urges to smoke**

Physical symptoms may include

- **insomnia**
- **feelings of restlessness**
- **loss of appetite**
- **tremors**
- **nightsweats**
- **diarrhoea**

Withdrawal symptoms are actually signs that the body is recovering and readapting to being cannabis free, therefore withdrawal symptoms are positive signs of recovery. They are short-term and it is impossible for them to persist for a great length of time. Most of the symptoms will gradually resolve within five to ten days.

The following strategies will assist in the management of urges/cravings:

- **distracting** (i.e. do something else)
- **delaying** (i.e. put it off as long as possible)
- **decatstrophising** (i.e. that it is not the end of the world... it will pass)
- **de-stressing** (i.e. do something relaxing)

Most of the uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms will come and go, just as urges to smoke come and go. In the tables provided, monitor your withdrawal symptoms over the course of one week by placing a tick in the space next to each symptom.

## monitoring withdrawal

### day 1

Symptoms	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Restlessness/irritability			
Perspiration/nightsweats			
Trouble sleeping/vivid dreams			
Depression			
Trouble concentrating			
Changes in appetite			
Headaches			

### day 2

Symptoms	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Restlessness/irritability			
Perspiration/nightsweats			
Trouble sleeping/vivid dreams			
Depression			
Trouble concentrating			
Changes in appetite			
Headaches			

### day 3

Symptoms	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Restlessness/irritability			
Perspiration/nightsweats			
Trouble sleeping/vivid dreams			
Depression			
Trouble concentrating			
Changes in appetite			
Headaches			

## day 4

Symptoms	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Restlessness/irritability			
Perspiration/nightsweats			
Trouble sleeping/vivid dreams			
Depression			
Trouble concentrating			
Changes in appetite			
Headaches			

## day 5

Symptoms	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Restlessness/irritability			
Perspiration/nightsweats			
Trouble sleeping/vivid dreams			
Depression			
Trouble concentrating			
Changes in appetite			
Headaches			

## day 6

Symptoms	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Restlessness/irritability			
Perspiration/nightsweats			
Trouble sleeping/vivid dreams			
Depression			
Trouble concentrating			
Changes in appetite			
Headaches			



# 5 putting it all together

## making the first efforts to change

One decision that you must make is whether to quit ‘cold turkey’ or taper off for a few days before quitting or cutting down. Each strategy has its merits and research with tobacco smokers has found that some people do better with one or the other. You will need to find the one that works best for you. Discuss this with your clinician.

## how to decide which change method to use

Suitability of sudden or gradual change depends largely on your degree of dependence.

If your degree of dependence is moderate to severe, you may want to think about cutting down over a few days prior to your change date.

This might mean that you

- gradually delay the time of day that you have your first smoke by 4–6 hours each day, and
- count the number of cones/joints and reduce this by about 20% per day

If quitting is your goal, you may want to try cutting down first before quitting. If you have been unable to slow down your smoking for quite some time, especially once you are stoned, you may need to quit ‘cold turkey’. If your level of dependence is mild-moderate, you may be better off quitting in this way. This method helps people to get on with it, and takes a lot of the hassle out of working out how to go about it. If you have tried one method in the past and it worked OK for a while, then use it again now. On the other hand, if it failed, then try another method this time.

Write down your **change date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## preparing mentally

As with any big task, success requires planning ahead and anticipation of trouble spots.

Virtually everybody who is successful in quitting says that it was not as bad as they thought it would be. It is the belief that it is going to be really difficult that puts people off and makes the job harder.

Many people find that they need to ‘clear the decks’ for a few days to minimise stress and other hassles. Therefore, try to arrange to have someone to help or relieve you of some of your responsibilities for a short while.

## beware of rationalisations (excuses)

At times the going can be tough and it may seem that your mind plays tricks to get you to have a smoke. These are rationalisations, and they are a way to make excuses for having a smoke.

e.g. “I’m too busy today”, “Just one last smoke”,  
“It’s a special occasion”, “I’ve had a really hard week”.

Becoming aware of rationalisations will help you to deal better with them. Become aware that you are beginning to rationalise, and announce the fact to yourself.

- make a firm, positive statement to yourself, reinforcing your decision to change and your desire to be successful. This will help to short circuit the strange twists that your mind can make when starting out

## separation/loss anxiety

Many people giving up cigarettes or drugs say that they feel like they are losing a good friend. Giving up cannabis may be a bit like this for you.

Such feelings do pass, although they take time. You will feel invigorated as you discover new possibilities and opportunities as your length of cannabis-free time increases.

## reviewing your progress

At the end of each day and successful week, you should reward yourself for a job well done. Even if you have not been perfect, you should think of the good things that you have achieved and be proud of them.

If you have made mistakes or had problems, remain positive by examining what they were and learning from them. At this point it is important to make a list of the things that have not been successful and summarise them. Think of strategies that you can use to help you to avoid making the same mistakes again next time. For example:

### problem:

- went to Jeff's place. Everyone was stoned. Before I realised it I had a bong in my hand

### remedy:

- avoid Jeff for a while
- anticipate your behaviour for that day
- practise urge surfing and delaying use if you find yourself at Jeff's
- review coping with high risk situations

## self monitoring

One of the most effective ways to maintain focus is to keep a regular diary or record of your progress.

This is called **self monitoring**.

Self monitoring will help you to make sure that you are keeping track of your commitment to change, and can assist you in recognising problematic patterns in your smoking.

The best way to do this is to keep a diary or use the self monitoring diary provided which records your goals for the week and allows you to write down your actual smoking for each day.

Use the self monitoring form provided (pp 29–30) to keep track of:

- your decision date (the date you have decided to make a change)
- your total number of days of abstinence/change (it is a good feeling to see these increasing!)
- daily amounts smoked
- possible problems situations/times/emotions

See whether your weekly goals match up with your result at the end of the week. If you have had trouble attaining the goals that you have set for the week, you should review the strategies that you are using, and make some changes to help you to get back on track.

## rewarding yourself

Often, people feel that they deserve a reward for all the hard work, and the best reward is, of course, a smoke. **Be aware that this is a major pitfall.** Have other rewards already worked out in advance, and be honest in acknowledging your achievements.

### reward options:

---

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

Make sure you reward yourself because it is hard work to change our behaviour. You should make sure you reward yourself for the changes you have made.

## self monitoring diary

Your decision date:

Date & Time	Situation: where/ with whom	Strength of urge/desire	Thoughts and feelings	Outcomes (actions, challenges, thoughts, consequences)	Amount smoked	Mastery rating (0-10)

Total number of days of abstinence/change:



# 6 relapse prevention

After a period of change, you will start to discover new aspects to your life that weren't possible while you were smoking heavily. This is a reward in itself. You will feel better physically and have more energy and enthusiasm for life. Life is what you make it, and you will find that the effort you put into changing now can be channelled into developing other aspects of your life that you would also like to change or enhance.

Think about the things that you would like to change or improve, and again make a list of these things.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Many people find that the temptation to have a smoke may pop up every now and again, months, and sometimes years, after quitting. This is often a fleeting feeling, and is usually easy to deal with. Having such a feeling does not mean that you have failed – it is normal and is a natural response to certain strong triggers.

## dealing with lapses

It is quite common for people to make mistakes when they are trying to learn any new task or skill. Becoming free of cannabis dependence is no different to learning any other skill, and just like any other skill, people do stumble occasionally. It is important to know that **this does not mean failure**, but is a temporary setback. Many people who are ultimately successful report that they had a slip along the way.

What is important in long-term success is how you handle that slip. Different ways of dealing with these slips depend on the type of slip experienced.

## lapsing intentionally

Lapsing can happen for a couple of reasons. You may tell yourself that it is too hard. You may get tired of working at your plan and decide to take a night off. You may decide that you deserve a reward for your hard work, and smoking is your favourite way of rewarding yourself. These feelings are common, try not to respond to them.

But if you have lapsed for these reasons, you should think carefully about your reasons for wanting to change.

- focus on the reasons that you decided to change and decide how important these reasons are to you (return to p 10)
- remind yourself that each slip will lessen your chances of long-term success. They will result in your urges returning more strongly again, which means more hard work in the future

## lapsing unintentionally

You may kick yourself when you realise the urge would have gone away in a short time anyway. These slips are due to exposure to high risk or tempting situations despite your best intentions, therefore review your overall strategies.

- what can be improved?
- are you finding some high risk situations too hard right now?
- how can you deal with them more effectively?

Doing some homework in this way will definitely help you to achieve your goals. Remember, the best thing is to get back on track as soon as possible, and remain positive about your overall effort to be successful.

## emergency plan for a lapse

A slip is not a major crisis when trying to change. Returning to your desired goal will require another all-out effort. Here are some things that can be done:

If I experience a lapse:

- I will get rid of the cannabis and get away from the setting where I lapsed
- I will realise that one smoke or even one day of smoking does not have to result in a full blown relapse
- I will not give in to feelings of guilt or blame myself because I know these feelings will pass in time
- I will call for help from someone else
- I will examine this lapse, identifying triggers and my reaction to them
- I will explore what I expected cannabis to change or provide
- I will set up a plan so that I will be able to cope with a similar situation in the future

**Remember – this lapse is only a temporary detour on the road to your desired change**

Write a detailed emergency plan for coping with high risk **relapse** situations.

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

## summary

Overcoming cannabis dependence is no easy task, but neither is it impossible. In fact, most people say that it was not as hard as they first thought. It takes dedication, effort and persistence.

If you have the desire to change, and work toward your goal in a careful and strategic way, it will work for you.

Becoming free of cannabis dependence will be a major reward in itself, but that is just the beginning. The opportunities that it brings may include the reward of the lifestyle that you have dreamed about and certainly owe yourself.

## reference

**Copeland, J., Swift, W., Rothman, R., & Stephens, R.** (2001). A randomized controlled trial of brief cognitive-behavioral interventions for cannabis use disorder. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 21, 55-64.



This book is based on a randomised controlled trial conducted by staff of NCPIC, UNSW  
Editorial Team: Jan Copeland, Ety Matalon, Greg Martin & Wendy Swift  
Acknowledgement: Vaughan Rees

### For more information contact:

National Cannabis Information  
and Helpline

**1800 30 40 50 (toll free)**

### Useful websites include the following:

National Cannabis Prevention  
and Information Centre

**[www.ncpic.org.au](http://www.ncpic.org.au)**

Family Drug Support

**[www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)**

Alcohol and Drug Information Network  
(ADIN)

**[www.adin.com.au](http://www.adin.com.au)**

Australian Drug Foundation (ADF)

**[www.adf.org.au](http://www.adf.org.au)**

Reachout – an interactive  
website for young people

**[www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)**