

Getting through Cannabis Withdrawal

Please note this factsheet is only a guide. If you are thinking about managing your cannabis use seek advice from your doctor to get support tailored to your needs.
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What is cannabis?

Cannabis (also called marijuana) is a depressant drug that slows messages between the brain and the body. It is usually made from the dried flowering heads and leaves of the cannabis plant. Cannabis may also be used in an extracted oil form, or as hashish, which is prepared from the resin of the plant.

Synthetic cannabis (e.g. Kronic, Spice) is man-made and designed to mimic the effects of cannabis. Synthetic cannabis is particularly harmful due to the chemicals used in its manufacture and its high potency.

What is cannabis withdrawal?

Cannabis withdrawal is a group of symptoms that occur after stopping or decreasing the amount of cannabis you use. Cannabis withdrawal symptoms may be physical or emotional, and are temporary.

What to expect in withdrawal

Different people will experience cannabis withdrawal differently. Some people may find cannabis withdrawal more challenging than others. If you are finding cannabis withdrawal hard see your doctor to get support.

How long does withdrawal last?

Cannabis withdrawal symptoms start within 24 hours after stopping use. Symptoms reach their peak between days 2-3 of withdrawal, start to improve after a week, and usually disappear after 2 weeks.

What are the common cannabis withdrawal symptoms?

Common physical symptoms of cannabis withdrawal include:

- Headache
- Muscle tension or restlessness
- Tremors
- Sweating
- Reduced appetite
- Upset stomach

Common emotional symptoms of cannabis withdrawal include:

- Agitation, irritability or anxiety
- Low mood or mood swings
- Feeling distracted
- Sleep difficulties and sleep disturbance

What are the benefits of quitting cannabis?

Cannabis use has been associated with the development of significant mental health problems for some individuals, including depression, anxiety, psychosis, and difficulties thinking or concentrating. Cannabis is also known to cause physical health problems, such as weight gain, breathing and lung issues, decreased sex drive and reduced immune function. By managing your cannabis use you can help protect yourself from these cannabis-related health risks.

Continuing cannabis use may also cause other problems in your life. Cannabis use could cause you financial problems, legal problems, affect your ability to work or create problems in your relationships.

How can I manage my cannabis use?

Step 1: Get help by talking to your doctor. You can talk to your doctor about where you would like to go through withdrawal (e.g. detox or at home), and medications that might help you to manage your withdrawal symptoms.

Step 2: Talk to someone and get support. The following services are available to you:

- **Drug and Alcohol Counselling:** Call the *National Alcohol and Other Drug Helpline* (1800 250 015) to be linked in with counselling in your area
- **Online Counselling:** Head to *Counselling Online* (www.counsellingonline.org.au) for web-based drug and alcohol counselling.
- **Peer Support:** Consider getting peer support from *Narcotics Anonymous* (www.na.org.au) or *SMART Recovery* (www.smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au)

Step 3: Get rid of any remaining cannabis and cut ties with your dealer to reduce your chances of a lapse.

Step 4: Get support to quit smoking - many people smoke tobacco mixed with their cannabis, and can experience difficulties with smoking cessation when trying to quit cannabis.

There are supports available to help you quit smoking. Call **Quit (13 QUIT or 13 78 48)** for help, and try nicotine replacement therapy (e.g. nicotine patches, gum, inhalers, lozenges) to improve your chances of quitting successfully.

What strategies can I use to manage my cannabis use?

- Stay positive and be kind to yourself while you are experiencing cannabis withdrawal
- Spend time with friends and family who support you
- Get away from your source of cannabis. This might include deleting your dealer's phone number and stopping contact with them.
- Avoid situations where you used to use cannabis and begin new activities to replace cannabis use
- Set goals and rewards for using the money you save by quitting
- Good **nutrition, exercise** and **sleep** will help your body recover and ease some of the discomfort caused by withdrawal symptoms.
- Warm baths, massage, light exercise and deep breathing can help with aches and pain, as well as tension and restlessness.
- Sleep difficulties are common in withdrawal so follow these tips to help you sleep:
 - Try to go to bed around the same time each night, and set an alarm to wake at the same time each day
 - Go to sleep when you feel tired
 - If you do not fall asleep within 30 minutes of being in bed get back up and return to bed only when you are feeling tired
- Expect to have cravings to use cannabis; they are a difficult but normal part of withdrawal. Use the 4 D's approach anytime you experience cravings:
 - **Delay** acting on the urge to use cannabis and remind yourself why you wanted to stop in the first place. The urge will pass after a few minutes on its own.
 - **Deep breathe.** Take long, slow breaths in and out. Repeat this three times.
 - **Do something else.** Take your mind off cannabis by doing something else: put on some music, keep your hands busy, or go for a walk
 - **Drink water.** Sip water slowly to beat cravings for cannabis. You'll feel better both physically and mentally.

What strategies can I use to manage my cannabis use? (continued)

- Most relapses occur within the first week after quitting. Having a specific plan or activity for each day can help you get through the withdrawal period and stay on track.
- Consider getting support for any stresses in your life. Stress can make your withdrawal worse than it actually is. Talk to your doctor or consider getting help from a counsellor.
- Know that sometimes people undertake a number of cannabis withdrawal attempts before succeeding. If you keep this in mind and keep going you will succeed.

