

Quitting Cannabis

UCSC Student Health Center - Student Health Outreach and Promotion

Adapted from: Trafalgar Addiction Treatment Centres and University of Vermont Center for Health and Wellbeing

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Is Cannabis Addictive?

While there are a lot of misperceptions about the addiction potential of cannabis, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), cannabis use does lead to dependence in some who use it regularly. Dependence is associated with withdrawal symptoms when cannabis is not used (irritability, mood and sleep difficulties, decreased appetite, cravings, restlessness^{1 2}). Recent studies show that around 30% of people who use cannabis may have some degree of cannabis use disorder, as defined by the DSM-IV³.

How Do I Quit?

Different approaches work for different people. Some people can quit “cold turkey” which means stopping all use all at once. Some people quit gradually, by tapering off their use. We will outline the two approaches below:

Quitting Gradually:

Step 1: What is your current intake?

Write it down. This is your baseline! For example: 1 gram on weekdays, 2 grams on weekends.

Step 2 - How much will you cut back?

Decide on something that is realistic and stick to it! Can you cut down .25 grams on weekdays, for example? Set yourself up for success, start small, you got this! If the amount you choose feels too challenging, scale back, and don't beat yourself up!

Step 3 - Create your timeline.

Once you decide how much you will cut back, create a timeline for your “Quit Day” (for example: .25 grams every 5 days until you get to zero - your Quit Day). Don't forget to celebrate the milestones along the way!

Step 4 - Notice any symptoms?

If you're feeling anxious, irritable, restless, etc. that's normal. Try integrating more of your go-to self-care strategies during this time or trying out some new ones. If weed was a part of your coping strategy, what might you replace it with now? (journaling, music, art, extra therapy, exercise, meditating, friend time, etc.).

Quitting Cold Turkey:

Maybe quitting gradually doesn't work for you, or maybe you need to quit right away for social, financial, or legal reasons. Before you quit cold turkey, try out the following:

Step 1: Reflect honestly.

Reflect honestly - what function does cannabis serve for you? Is it a sleep-aid? Anti-anxiety? Set yourself up for success by having other strategies ready to use in place of cannabis to help fill these functions.

¹ Budney AJ, Hughes JR. The cannabis withdrawal syndrome. *Curr Opin Psychiatry*. 2006;19(3):233-238. doi:10.1097/01.yco.0000218592.00689.e5

² Gorelick DA, Levin KH, Copersino ML, et al. Diagnostic Criteria for Cannabis Withdrawal Syndrome. *Drug Alcohol Depend*. 2012;123(1-3):141-147. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2011.11.007

³ Hasin DS, Saha TD, Kerridge BT, et al. Prevalence of Marijuana Use Disorders in the United States Between 2001-2002 and 2012-2013. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2015;72(12):1235-1242. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2015.1858

Step 2: Remove temptations.

This may seem obvious, but start by removing all your weed and weed-related paraphernalia - pipes, bongs, vape pens, dab rigs, even lighters from your house. This helps remove temptation and the option to use. Lock up your stash, or have a trusted friend hold onto it.

Step 3: Know your triggers.

A “trigger” is something that you’ve been conditioned to associate with weed. For example: Being with a certain friend who you always smoke with, your route home takes you by the dispensary, midterms stress has you reaching for your vape. Knowing when and why you’re conditioned to use can help you better prepare to avoid tempting situations and to take extra steps to minimize your risk for relapse. (For example: Meeting that friend at a restaurant where you can’t smoke, taking a different route home, and planning more stress-reduction activities before and during midterms).

Step 4: Know your support network.

Having friends and supportive people who know you’re planning to quit can help a great deal! Letting friends in on your plan can create a sense of accountability. You don’t have to tell everyone! But, having one or two trusted friends that you can check in with if you’re struggling can help make this process smoother.

Need Extra Support?

Quitting cannabis is not easy, but you can do it, and UCSC Student Health Services is here for you!

- Talk with a SHOP Health Educator: shop@ucsc.edu
- Talk with an Alcohol & Other Drug Educator at The COVE: jbbru@ucsc.edu
- Talk with a clinician: (831) 459-2211
- Talk with a CAPS therapist: (831) 459-2628
- Meet others who are cannabis-free or trying to cut back: shop.ucsc.edu/students-in-recovery/thecove.html