



Learning New Coping Strategies

Some Alternatives to Marijuana Use

You can do many things to stop using marijuana. Some may work better than others. Some things may help you resist the urge to smoke, avoid tempting situations or satisfy your needs in more constructive ways than smoking marijuana.

Be kind to yourself as you begin this change process – you’re doing something to take care of yourself, and you deserve all the comfort and self-acceptance you can get! Remind yourself that learning and changing inevitably mean giving up old ways and that, in time, you will feel more comfortable. Remember the changes your body and mind went through when you learned to drive, got to know a new person, started a new job, or learned a new skill. Chances are you felt awkward, uncomfortable, silly, dumb, scared, frustrated, impatient, or anxious, in addition to, hopeful, excited, and challenged. What helped you then? How long did it take for you to feel relaxed? Did you learn all at once, or were improvement and progress gradual?

Actions

- Avoid or escape from situations that make you want to smoke marijuana. Sometimes this is the easiest way to resist temptation, especially in the beginning.
- Delay decisions to give in to temptation; for example, you could wait 15 minutes. Take several deep breaths. Focus on the fresh air entering your lungs, cleansing and nourishing your body. Let the tension out with each exhale.
- Change your physical position. Stand up and stretch, walk around the room, or step outside.
- Carry things to put in your mouth:
 - Toothpicks
 - Gum
 - Mints
 - Plastic Straws
 - Low-Calorie Snacks
- Carry objects to fiddle with:
 - A rubber ball to squeeze
 - A small puzzle
 - A pebble
 - Worry beads
- Have a distracting activity available:
 - A crossword puzzle
 - Magazine
 - Book
 - Postcard to write



Thoughts

- Self-talk
 - Give yourself a pep talk.
 - Remind yourself of your reasons for quitting.
 - Remind yourself of the consequences of using marijuana.
 - Challenge any wavering in your commitment to quit.
- Imagery and visualization
 - Focus on positive imagery:
 - Ø Visualize yourself as a non-smoker, happy, healthy, and in control
 - Ø Imagine your lungs getting pink and healthy
 - Focus on negative imagery:
 - Ø Imagine yourself with cancer, emphysema, unable to breathe and in constant need of care.
 - Ø Visualize yourself in a jail made of marijuana cigarettes symbolizing the way marijuana controls your life.
- Thought-stopping
 - Tell yourself loudly to STOP.
 - Get up and do something else.
- Distraction: Focus on something different
 - The task at hand
 - A daydream
 - A fantasy
 - Counting backwards from 150 by 3's

Lifestyle

- Get your body moving by exercise, taking a brisk daily walk, taking stairs instead of the elevator, parking further away from your destination and when possible, walk instead of drive.
- Practice relaxation or meditation techniques regularly
- Take up a new hobby or pick up an old hobby that you used to enjoy.
- Drink less coffee or switch to decaf. Try herbal teas instead.
- Engage in an enjoyable activity that is not work related several times a week
- Change routines associated with smoking marijuana, at least temporarily; for example, don't turn on the TV when you get home from work; don't spend time with friends who smoke.

Social Interactions and Environment

- Remove smoking paraphernalia (pipes, papers, bong, ashtrays, lighters, marijuana) from your home and car.
- Go to places where it's difficult to get high, such as the library, theater, swimming pool, sauna, steam bath, restaurant, and public gatherings (not rock concerts)
- Spend time with friends who don't smoke.
- Enlist support from family and friends by announcing you've quit and asking people who smoke not to offer it to you or smoke it around you. Also ask them to praise you for quitting and provide emotional support.
- Learn to be appropriately assertive; learn to handle frustration and anger directly instead of by smoking.



Specific Suggestions for Some Common High-Risk Situations

Below are several high-risk situations that people who use marijuana confront, along with suggestions for coping without smoking.

Tension Relief and Negative Emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety, nervousness, irritability)

- Develop relaxation techniques
- Exercise.
- Write down your feelings.
- Talk to someone (a friend or counselor).
- Do something enjoyable that requires little effort.
- Figure out what you're feeling and whether you can do anything about it.

Anger, Frustration, and Interpersonal Conflict

- Try to handle the situation directly rather than hide your feelings.
- If appropriate, be assertive.
- Get some release by squeezing a rubber ball, pounding a pillow, or doing some physical activity.
- Write down your feelings or tell them to someone.
- Take deep breaths.

Fatigue and Low Energy

- Do muscle relaxations.
- Take a brisk walk.
- Do something enjoyable.
- Eat properly.
- Get enough sleep.

Insomnia

- Don't fight being unable to sleep.
- Get up and do something constructive or relaxing.
- Read a book.
- Watch TV.
- Do muscle relaxations until you feel sleepy.
- Remember, no one dies from losing a night's sleep.

Timeout

- Read.
- Do a puzzle.
- Prepare a healthy snack.
- Take up a hobby.
- Try knitting or other needle work (things you can carry with you for easy access).



Self-Image

- Try a new image
- Get a haircut/hair style
- Buy some new clothes

Social Pressure

- Be aware when others are smoking.
- Remember your commitment not to smoke marijuana.
- Be assertive and request that people not offer you marijuana.
- If appropriate ask that they not smoke around you for a while.
- If necessary, be prepared to leave the situation, especially if you've just recently quit.

Situations Involving Alcohol

After you've quit marijuana, you may continue to associate drinking with smoking marijuana. Alcohol can make you less vigilant about resisting marijuana. It tends to make people less concerned about long-term consequences. You might consider not drinking or cutting down during the first few weeks after quitting. If you don't want to do this be especially careful when you drink.

Cravings and Urges

The only way to interrupt cravings is to break the chain of responding to them. That is, don't give in to them. Eventually they will decrease. Do something to distract yourself; use the techniques listed under *Thoughts* (breathe deeply, call a friend, go for a walk, move around, time the urge) and you'll find that it will disappear like a wave breaking.

Acknowledgements

Adapted from *Brief Counseling for Marijuana Dependence: A Manual for Treating Adults* provided by:
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services SAMHSA Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.