

A guide to quitting Marijuana and Hashish

**Drug Addiction Treatment Centre
Lund University Hospital
Lund, Sweden**

Address:

Lund University hospital

Kioskgatan 17

S-221 85 Lund Sweden

Phone + 46 46 178932

Fax + 46 46 176092

Email Thomas.Lundqvist@med.lu.se

This is a guide for those who seriously want to quit using Marijuana and Hashish.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDE:

- Basic facts
- How does cannabis affect me?
- Why do I use cannabis?
- Why should I quit?
- Check your way of thinking as a cannabis user
- Cannabis a treacherous drug
- The process of quitting
- How do I stay off cannabis?

BASIC FACTS

Cannabis preparations (Marijuana and Hashish) contain about 420 compounds, of which about 60 are called cannabinoids. The most important and examined compound is Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which has psychoactive potency (not the only one). THC is also used to indicate the potency of the preparation (in percentage).

Marijuana consists of 0.35%-5% of THC, sometimes with a content up of 30% of THC.

Hashish 4% - 10% of THC, sometimes more.

Hash oil 4% - 60% of THC.

THC is fat soluble meaning that it accumulates body fat.

It is gradually metabolized in these tissues to inactive metabolites, the most important is Delta-9-carboxy-THC which is 1/10 as active as THC. Another major metabolite produced is 11-hydroxy-THC, which is approximately 20 percent more potent than THC, and penetrates the blood-brain barrier more rapidly. These metabolites are then excreted in the urine, faeces (2/3) and blood (1/3). The terminal half-life of THC is between 1-7 days, with an average 2-5 days and metabolites of THC can be found in urine as long as 10 weeks after smoking cessation.

This slow and prolonged elimination of THC and its metabolites may be the origin of a chronic influence (see below).

HOW DOES CANNABIS AFFECT ME?

Cannabis has two effects on human cognitive functioning, an acute effect (1) and an additional chronic effect (2)

1. The acute intoxication consists of two phases.
2. The chronic influence is established after a period of regular heavy use.

You who are a regular user will probably not recognize the description of the acute intoxication, but you may remember how it was several years ago.

1. Acute intoxication

Phase one

After about ten minutes, and up to 45 minutes after smoking, the user will experience a “high” (after smoking approx. 4-5 times) but initially also some physiological symptoms:

Palpitation, dizziness, coughs, feeling of increased pressure inside the head, increased pulse, dryness in the eyes, mouth, and throat.

You are also red-eyed and sensitive to light.

Psychological symptoms of the subjective “high” are:

A feeling of being mentally active and environmentally-oriented.

A tendency to become giggly and talkative (for experienced smokers this is unusual).

Phase two

Phase two is self-oriented with a feeling of being mentally active. It will last for about three to four hours.

You who are an experienced smoker probably have a shorter period of acute intoxication (an hour and a half) and are thereby urged to smoke more often to achieve a “high”.

This phase is mainly focused on the inner-self (like turning up the volume on your senses):

You have an increased train of thoughts and you have a lot of associations to your thoughts.

The colours you are looking at are more intense and your sense of smell makes the smells more salient.

Details of an entity you earlier neglected are now more conspicuous.

You like to sit and listen to music, watch videos or just hang around.

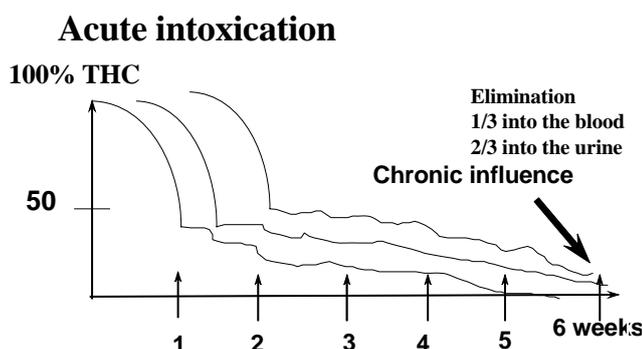
In the acute intoxication you find the positive reasons for smoking cannabis. Cannabis preparations influence your feelings in the same way as turning up the volume on the radio.

Everything you experience becomes more intensive. In this condition it is easy to deny the negative effects (chronic influence) of cannabis.

The acute intoxication gives you the following sensations:

It gives you a feeling of being more calm and relaxed.

It improves your social sensitivity.



It enhances your sexual experiences.

It enables you to cope better with difficult situations or persons.

It serves to improve or enhance self-awareness.

It increases your understanding of you and others.

It gives you more insight and tolerance about what is going on around you.

2. Chronic influence

Clinical observations show that the use of cannabis more often than about every six weeks (elimination time of THC) for approximately two years, lead to changes in cognitive functioning. These changes create a new state of consciousness which can be described as a "cannabis state dependant" effect.

This effect may result from the release of stored THC.

It can be described as follows:

Experimenting with cannabis, you are frequently acutely intoxicated and experience this state in relation to a normal non-intoxicated state of consciousness. The aftereffects are a passive, unreflecting, and blunt state of consciousness, lasting a day or two. If you smoke again within a period of six weeks or less, these aftereffects last longer. You have gradually adjusted to this altered state of awareness and it will be your new normal state of consciousness. After a period of regular use you then experience the acute state of intoxication in relation to the effect of the chronic influence (being passive and blunt).

After a critical period of chronic use, the acute state of intoxication is then perceived as one which creates a feeling of being capable and normal. This state lasts for two to three hours and is reported as weaker than day-to-day capacity in the non-intoxicated state. The effects vary with the doses used over time. Acutely intoxicated you will experience a feeling of capacity and a sense of being normal and thereby enabled to perform different tasks.

In the beginning you smoke to get stoned, but after a while (individually) you have to smoke to be normal and to get a nice feeling.

Implications

Most users are not aware of this process.

To do something you first has to smoke cannabis.

You are not using your full intellectual capacity.

WHY DO I USE CANNABIS?

There are many reasons why individuals are using pot. Therefore it is necessary and important that you find your reason to smoke pot. We know that common answers are to relax, to escape, forget and avoid (or postpone) to solve problems.

Give three reasons, why you are smoking cannabis:

1.....

2.....

3.....

Every cannabis smoker has his own pattern of use!

You can discover your own by, e.g. asking yourself:

Which joint is the most important one during a normal day?

Answer:.....

Do you have to smoke a joint before you watch a movie, socialize with friends or when you want to listen to music?

Answer:.....

Check your dependence.

1. Do you have difficulties to stop thinking on cannabis?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
2. Is it more important for you getting high, than getting your next meal?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
3. Do you plan your day according to smoking opportunities?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
4. Do you smoke in the morning, at noon, and in the evening?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
5. Is getting high more important, than who it is you are smoking with?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
6. Do you smoke as much as you want, not bothering thinking of tomorrow?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
7. Do you smoke in spite of knowing that many of your problems depend on your cannabis use?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
8. Are you able to abstain from smoking, once you have started?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
9. Do you become more active and focused under the influence?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always
10. Have you noticed memory deficits as a result of cannabis smoking and that your memory improves under the influence?
Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always

- | | |
|--|--|
| 11. Do you wake up numb and try to remedy this with a joint? | Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always |
| 12. Do you have problems to go to sleep without initially having smoked? | Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always |
| 13. Are trying to socialize with other people when abstaining from smoking? | Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always |
| 14. Are you avoiding other people under influence – getting paranoid? | Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always |
| 15. Do you smoke, in spite should you experience strange and troublesome thoughts under the influence? | Never
Sometimes
Often
Almost always |

WHY SHOULD I QUIT?

There are of course many reasons why you should quit.

Give three reasons, why you should quit right now:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

Which are the conditions you need to stop using cannabis?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

CHECK YOUR WAY OF THINKING AS A CANNABIS USER

By reading the symptoms listed below you can get a picture of how cannabis has influenced your way of thinking. Answer the questions with a YES or NO. **BE HONEST.** Don't forget that users who have consumed high doses over long time periods can be expected to show almost all of the symptoms that are listed. Those having consumed lower doses can be expected to show fewer of these symptoms.

These symptoms disappear or improve when quitting. It is, however, necessary to say that this is not happening automatically. If you don't improve on the described items, please apply for treatment.

Concerning your verbal ability

Have you noticed,

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| that you have become less able to find exact words with which to express yourself? | Yes | No |
| that other people have difficulties in understanding what you mean? | Yes | No |
| that you have problems in understanding what other persons mean? | Yes | No |
| Your ways of expressing feelings have faded? | Yes | No |
| that you have a feeling of being screened off (like sitting in a glass jar)? | Yes | No |
| that you have problems in taking part in a discussions? | Yes | No |
| that you have feelings of being misunderstood and lonely? | Yes | No |

Concerning your ability to make correct conclusions

Have you noticed,

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| that your ability to assess your own behaviour have faded? | Yes | No |
| that you have noticed that you repeat your mistakes? | Yes | No |
| that you have problems to correct errors and mistakes? | Yes | No |
| that you don't care about the mistakes you make? | Yes | No |
| that you experience feelings of emptiness and gloominess in you daily life? | Yes | No |
| that you experience feelings of being inadequate and unsuccessful? | Yes | No |

Concerning your flexibility of thought

Have you noticed,

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| that it is difficult to maintain a train of thought in a complex situation? | Yes | No |
| that you have become more one-sided? | Yes | No |
| that it is difficult to concentrate? | Yes | No |
| that it is difficult to maintain attention? | Yes | No |
| that it is difficult to have a correct focus of attention? | Yes | No |
| that it is difficult to shift attention? | Yes | No |
| that it is difficult to understand points of view of others? | Yes | No |
| that you and your cannabis smoking friends are talking to and not with each other? | Yes | No |

Concerning your memory

Have you noticed,

that it is difficult to maintain the theme of a story?	Yes	No
that you forget meetings, promises, and so on?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to estimate the passage of time?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to imagine long time spans.	Yes	No
that it is difficult to read books, watch a film and so on?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to recollect the past?	Yes	No
that you experience feelings of bad memory, and lack of patience?	Yes	No

Concerning synthesizing from parts to whole (Analytic-Synthetic Ability)

Have you noticed,

that you seldom change your opinion, notions or standards?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to sort out adequate information?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to classify information in a correct way?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to understand the shade of meaning in information?	Yes	No
that you have an attitude of living an alternative way of life?	Yes	No
that you experience feelings like "I'm different, I'm unique."?	Yes	No
that you seldom change mental set in problem solving, social perception?	Yes	No
that you have a feeling of not knowing yourself?	Yes	No

Concerning the ability to locate oneself and function in the time and space continuum

Have you noticed,

that it is difficult to be aware of the immediate environment?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to create routines of the day or the week?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to differentiate the time of the year and/or the time of the day?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to notice the relations between other people?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to have a mental map of surroundings?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to structure the daily life?	Yes	No
that you experience feelings like being free, don't belong to the society?	Yes	No

Concerning Holistic memory, which help us to create patterns and pictures of what we see.

Have you noticed,

that it is difficult to create patterns and pictures of the visual world?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to remember the relations between other people?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to maintain routines of the day or the week?	Yes	No
that it is difficult to put names to faces?	Yes	No
that you experience feelings of living in a world of my own?	Yes	No

The questions listed above are symptoms reported by more than 400 chronic cannabis users. These symptoms are the characteristics of a chronic use of cannabis. Perhaps you don't have all the symptoms listed, but remember those you have and notice if you have changed after six weeks of abstinence.

CANNABIS IS A TREACHEROUS DRUG

Experimenting with cannabis you will get intoxicated (acutely) and experience the significance of this state in comparison to your normal state of consciousness.

Smoking cannabis more often than every six weeks creates a shift in consciousness towards being passive, unreflecting, and blunt. You will gradually adjust to this and it will be a new normal state of consciousness. The significance of the acute intoxication will then be experienced in comparison to this altered state of consciousness. Smoking cannabis you will experience a feeling of capacity and a sense of being normal and thereby make it possible for you to perform different tasks.

In the beginning you smoke to get stoned, but after a while (individually) you have to smoke to be normal and to get a nice feeling.

The influence of the chronic use affects the cognitive processes in such a way that you can't question or criticize your behaviour and will therefore be unable to change it if necessary. This will create a "cannabis pattern", a new identity, which is a continuous ongoing process, so the longer the use continues the stronger the cannabis pattern will grow. It is a kind of filter which filters out everything negative said about cannabis. The "cannabis pattern" contains pat answers to every effort made to convince you to quit the habit, e.g.

Everybody smokes pot.

I can quit whenever I want to, but I do not want to right now.

My habit is not a problem. The safety of nuclear power is a problem. Alcohol is much more dangerous.

Cannabis is a natural herb.

I become creative and it enhances my artistic ability, and therefore I can go on smoking pot.

I have many friends, who fit the description but I don't. I'm unique. I'm immune to the negative effects.

I have a deficit that is compensated, when I'm moderately stoned.

Do you have your own pat answers?

.....
.....
.....

Cannabis magnifies your negative feelings and causes anxiety. To get rid of the bad feelings you have to smoke cannabis again.

During an overall puberty crisis cannabis helps the teenager to screen of the environment. A pseudo development will replace the natural maturity. The natural puberty will continue after cessation of use. The desire to be screened of is often caused by a psychological or social deficit.

THE PROCESS OF QUITTING

When you stop using cannabis it will take at least six weeks before most of the cannabis has left your system (sometimes up to ten weeks). It is important to abstain totally, because if you smoke one joint every day, you will never get a total elimination. In that case it will be more difficult to deal with your emerging feelings on an intellectual basis.

The quitting process may be divided into three phases, where each phase has its own characteristics and problems.

Phase one

has a bio-medical focus lasting until the 12th day after smoking cessation.

The symptoms listed below are often experienced by chronic users?

Did or do you have:

Sleeping disorders?	Yes	No	
Cold and warm perspiration?	Yes	No	
Enhanced dream activity?	Yes	No	
Muscular pain?	Yes	No	
Headache?	Yes	No	
Head cold?	Yes	No	
Indigestion?	Yes	No	
Irritation?			Yes No
Negative feelings?	Yes	No	

What is your main focus during this phase of the detox?

Don't make the decision **never to smoke again**. Make the decision to abstain today. Tomorrow you make the decision to abstain that day, and so on.

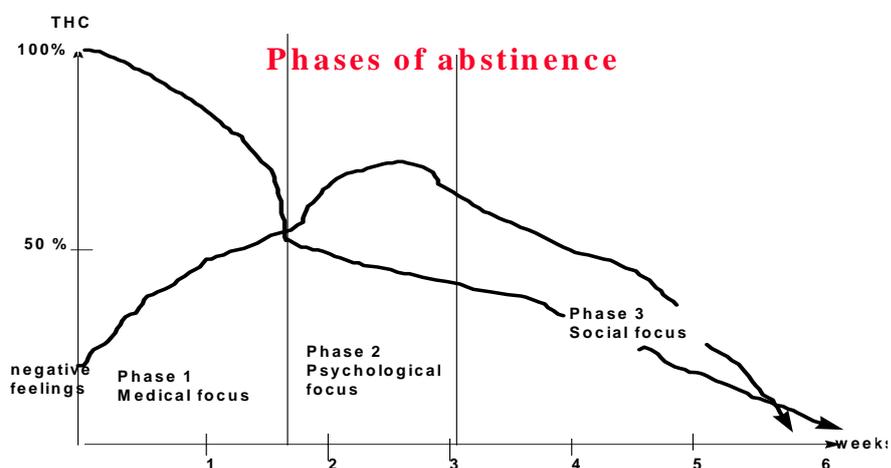
Relapse during this phase are mainly reactions to avoid the above listed symptoms. Don't forget, these symptoms are only temporary.

Notice even the minor changes in your perception of the immediate social environment.

Consider in what different directions you change.

Compare your way of functioning, now and under the influence of cannabis

Ask your friends or relatives if they have noticed any changes?



Phase two

has a psychological focus lasting until three weeks after smoking cessation. The negative feelings will surface during this period. Remember that these feelings may be the result of the inability to verbalize feelings of anger, sadness and so on. In this phase your dream activity becomes more intense.

What is your main focus during this phase of the detox?

You will still have difficulties to deal with problems in daily life. It will, however, change to the better.

You will be emotional unbalanced. Think of the things that make you feel good, and what make you feel bad.

Consider how you handle problems in your daily life.

You have to identify your different strategies of avoiding difficult situations.

Use your new found ability of considering and reflection.

Relapses in this phase are often caused by an inability to verbalize emerging feelings. Therefore it's important to continue to notice, compare and consider.

Ask your friends or relatives if they have noticed any changes?

Phase three

has a psycho social focus. It is a new beginning in the process of maturation. In your cannabis period the maturation process has slowed down and a substitute identity has emerged. It is an important quest to identify your original identity.

What is your main focus during this phase of the detox?

Compare your old cannabis-related notions about a "normal" life, with how you look at it now.

Your old way of dealing with problems must be analysed and eventually substituted with others more suitable.

You have to focus on and question your goals. Where am I and where will I go?

Try not to forget that you are in the beginning of a new phase in life, which has no end. It is a continuation of the psychological maturation which was slowed down by the effects of cannabis.

Now is the time to try to remember why cannabis became an attractive drug.

It is common that the chronic user has a transitional period of emptiness and a feeling of loss.

Relapses during this phase may be an effect of several causes:

- The detection and confrontation with your own immaturity.

- A feeling of losing an important part of your life.

- That you got too much to catch up with.

- That the reorientation process is too overwhelming.

- That you do not possess any alternative strategies to solve your problems.

- That you always have to guess because you don't know what to do.

HOW DO I STAY OFF CANNABIS?

Circumstances that may provoke relapses were pointed out in three phases. These circumstances will remain treacherous and probably provoke situations where you feel it as your human right to have a relapse, so don't lose your intellectual control. Try to change your lifestyle.

You have to prepare yourself how you are going to tell your friends why you have quit smoking cannabis.

Try to develop daily and weekly plans, create new routines.

Create a plan of actions for stressful situations.

Try to establish new relations.

Try to be conscious of the qualitative value in your relationships.

Try to establish realistic goals, to make your life manageable.

Try to avoid situations and places that will lead to a relapse.

If and when you got cravings, try to find the origin.

You don't have to prove that you can abstain by consciously seeking old places of abuse.

Once in a while it is important to focus on what made you decide to quit.

Try to establish contact with someone understanding the process of change.

Get rid of all your smoking paraphernalia.

Do not substitute your cannabis habit with alcohol or other drugs.

Try to write down your own rules and advice!

When you return to this guide after abstaining for approx. six weeks, are your answers still valid?

What has changed?

Do you have the feeling of improvement?

Do you have a different perception of the personal problems that you had in the early stages of abstinence?

Do you experience improved coping skills?

Do you find the correct words more easily?

Has your ability to cope with aggression improved?

Do you have the feeling of being capable to correct mistakes while speaking?

Do you consider yourself being capable to participate in a dialogue and in an active way to notice, consider, and compare?

Do you notice a qualitative difference when watching a film or reading a book?

Have you noticed that you are able to concentrate on the main theme in a discussion?

Have you noticed that the short-term memory has improved?

Do you notice a difference in your opinions, views and so on?

Have you noticed the return of smells, scents, and different tastes?

Do you in a better way than before detect environmental patterns?

This check list is based on statements reported by chronic cannabis users who have gone through treatment and abstained for more than six weeks.

This is a guide for you who seriously want to quit Marijuana and Hashish.

If you can't abstain, or relapse, or don't feel good, apply for treatment at your local Drug Addiction Treatment Centre.

This guide is created by the staff together with patients at the Drug Addiction Treatment Centre at the University hospital, Lund, Sweden. The idea originates from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

For you who are interested in knowing more about cannabis and its effect on humans, please read:

Cognitive dysfunctions in chronic cannabis users observed during treatment, an integrative approach, Thomas Lundqvist, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm Sweden, 1995.

The health and psychological consequences of cannabis use, National Drug Strategy Monograph Series No. 25, Wayne Hall, Nadia Solowij and Jim Lemon, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Sydney, Australia, 1994.