

# FRANK

## cannabis

TOO MUCH TOO OFTEN?



**Okay, so cannabis gets you high. It helps you to relax and unwind and can make you feel good...**



# ...but are you in control of your cannabis use? Or is it controlling you?

You can become dependent on cannabis, just like you can with other drugs. Your dependency might be more psychological than physical – but it can still cause problems in your life.

This guide is for heavy cannabis users. It helps you understand what cannabis might be doing to you, both mentally and physically, and what steps you can take if you want to cut back or quit. It explains the risks and the law, and points the way to further help and information.

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For more info and confidential advice you can call **FRANK on 0800 77 66 00** or go to **talktofrank.com**

# ups and downs

## You probably have lots of reasons for using cannabis:

- > to get high
- > to relax
- > to chill out with your mates and have a laugh
- > because you enjoy it

## but have you experienced any of the downs?

In the short term, cannabis can:

- > make you feel sick
- > aggravate asthma
- > make you feel paranoid or edgy
- > put a strain on the heart
- > lead to confusion and hallucinations

## Did you know?

Cannabis contains at least as many cancer-causing chemicals as tobacco.

# But the biggest risks from cannabis are associated with regular, long-term use. These include:

## Physical health problems

- > lower heart rate and blood pressure
- > increased risk of throat and lung diseases like bronchitis and cancer
- > nicotine addiction if you smoke cannabis in joints
- > lower fertility, so it can be harder to have children

## Social problems

- > debt and money troubles
- > losing interest in partners, friends and leisure activities

## Work problems

- > doing badly at college or work because you can't concentrate
- > losing your motivation, so you give up or drop out

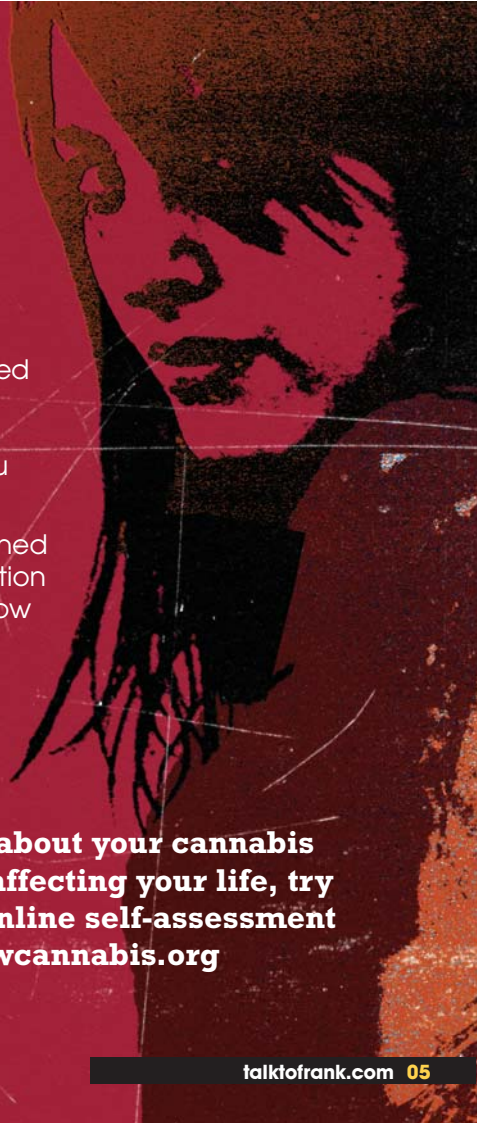
## Mental health problems

- > psychological addiction: up to 10% of users become dependent on cannabis
- > forgetfulness
- > depression
- > anxiety and paranoia
- > risk of psychotic symptoms
- > contributing to the risk of schizophrenia
- > if you have mental health problems, you may be more likely to relapse and cannabis can stop your medication from working

# me? a cannabis habit?

**If any of the following sound familiar, it could mean that your cannabis use is becoming more than a bit of fun in your spare time.**

- > do you often find yourself thinking about your next joint?
- > are you using larger amounts than before or doing it more often?
- > do you try to give up, but then get back on it again?
- > are you losing interest in other activities?
- > are all your friends using cannabis too?
- > do you need more and more to get the same hit?
- > do you get edgy when you run out of stash or your supplies are low?



If you have experienced one or more of these symptoms it doesn't necessarily mean you are dependent.

But if you are concerned about it, the next section has information on how to cut down or stop altogether.

**To find out more about your cannabis use and how it's affecting your life, try the five-minute online self-assessment quiz at [www.knowcannabis.org](http://www.knowcannabis.org)**

# where's the fun in quitting?



"I'd tried loads of times but I couldn't give up weed. A lot of my mates smoked it – and I still liked it. So I decided to cut back instead. That meant I had more time (and energy and money) to

do other things – like seeing old mates and playing the odd game of football. I'm feeling healthier and I'm still having a laugh. Maybe I'll stop altogether."

**Tyler, 17**

"After five years of smoking dope pretty much every day, I was definitely doing it out of habit. It wasn't that much fun and it was costing me loads. Stopping was really hard, but eventually I did it. My friends and family were glad to have the 'old me' back – and so was I." **Geri, 20**



**Most people say quitting or cutting back isn't as bad as they thought it would be. And they often only realise how much cannabis was affecting them when they stop. Imagining what your life will be like without cannabis can help you take the first step...**

# cutting down

## Not ready to stop but want to ease off a bit?

### 1. **Pace yourself**

Reduce the risk of overdoing it by spacing out the days when you use cannabis

### 2. **Don't bulk buy**

Or you might end up using more than you intended

### 3. **Change your routine**

Try to avoid the things you associate with cannabis – do something else or be somewhere else

### 4. **Be kinder to your throat, chest and lungs**

If you smoke spliffs, don't inhale too deeply or for too long – it won't get you any higher, it may just mean that you breathe in more toxins

### 5. **Don't buy the stronger stuff**

Skunk can be much stronger than weed or hash, which won't do you any favours



# giving up

**If you think it's time to stop altogether, having a clear plan of action will help you stay determined and focused.**

It doesn't need to be complicated – just spend some time and effort in three important steps:

**1**  
**1. Think about it**

**2**  
**2. Make a plan**

**3**  
**3. Do it**

**Turn the page for step 1**

# 1. think about it

**Giving up is your decision. It needs to be something you really want to do. And you need to understand your habit to tackle it effectively.**

> **Work out the pros and cons**

In the end it's your decision – writing a list of the pros and cons can give you a balanced picture

> **Understand your habit**

Start keeping a record of how much you are using, when and why you use it, who with and how it makes you feel before and after

> **Make a choice**

If you think it's time to stop, move on to step 2

**Understanding your 'triggers' is vital. See page 18 for more info.**

Give yourself time to do this step properly. Checking your use over four weeks will help you understand why you do it and what triggers it.

If you've got access to a computer you could use the online self-help programme at [www.knowcannabis.org.uk](http://www.knowcannabis.org.uk)

You can access your account every day or every few days to keep track of your cannabis use. Everything you record is confidential.



**Turn the page for step 2**

## 2. make a plan

**This is when the idea starts to become a reality. But don't just jump in. You're more likely to succeed if you plan it out first.**

- > **Pick a day to stop**  
And stick to it
- > **Get some support lined up**  
Talk to family and friends, especially if you know people who've managed to stop taking cannabis themselves
- > **Put diversions in place**  
Decide what you'll do instead of using cannabis. If possible try something new or different
- > **Avoid your 'triggers' (find out more on page 18)**  
Work out who and what you need to avoid and how you will do this

**I'm putting my plan into action on:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**The things I'll do instead of getting stoned:**

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# 3. do it

**You've thought about it, planned it and now it's here – the first hours and days of your cannabis-free life.**

> **Remember why**

Remind yourself why you want to give up and what the benefits are; think of the money you are saving and the things you'll be able to do

> **Deal with temptation**

Distract yourself by planning to do something else you enjoy

Get on the phone to someone you trust for moral support

Do something else to relax, like going for a walk or having a bath

Avoid high-risk situations and people who smoke



> **Take it a day at a time**

Don't give yourself a hard time if you slip up – many people find it can take a few attempts before they succeed

> **Reward yourself**

Every week, if you've made good progress, do something special or buy something nice to treat yourself

**Giving up is a massive achievement. Keep this in mind and feel proud of what you've done. Stay positive and remember you're in control.**



# withdrawal

**If you've been using cannabis heavily for a while, you might experience some psychological or physical symptoms when you stop. Most of these will only last seven to ten days.**

## **You might feel:**

- > anxious
- > depressed
- > angry
- > confused
- > irritable
- > a massive craving for a joint

## **You might experience:**

- > sleeplessness
- > loss of appetite
- > tremors
- > night sweats
- > diarrhoea

These symptoms are uncomfortable, but they aren't dangerous and they will pass. While you are coming off cannabis, make sure you look after yourself. Try to eat well and get some exercise. It might be the last thing you feel like doing, but exercise will help you sleep better and build up your resistance.

**THC (the main active chemical in cannabis) is stored in the body's fat cells. It therefore takes longer to fully clear the system than any other common drug. However, people often find that giving up weed is not as difficult or as painful as they thought: it's nothing like trying to kick a heroin addiction.**

**Although withdrawal symptoms aren't much fun, they show that your body is adjusting to life without cannabis – and they won't last.**



# high risk situations

**Do you always get stoned with the same crowd, or in a particular place, or on a certain day or after something has happened?**

These are your unconscious 'triggers' – the things that make you reach for a joint. Here are some ways to deal with them:

> **change the way you think about cannabis**

Think about all the things you could do if you weren't smoking cannabis

> **leave or change the situation**

> **do something unrelated to smoking**

> **buy yourself some time**

Put off the decision to smoke for 15 minutes and see how you feel after that

**Make sure you know what your triggers are before you try to cut down or stop.**

# the law

## **Cannabis is a Class C drug and is illegal.**

The maximum sentence for **possessing** it is two years in prison and an unlimited fine.

The maximum penalty for **supplying** it is 14 years in prison and an unlimited fine.

If you get caught with cannabis on you, the police will always act. You could get a warning, but you are more likely to be arrested if:

- > **You are blatantly smoking in public**
- > **You've been caught before**

**Growing your own, carrying a lot or sorting out your mates puts you at risk of being charged with dealing or 'intent to supply'.**

**It's illegal to drive under the influence of drugs. If you're caught you face the same penalties as someone who has been drink-driving.**

**If you're under 18, your parent or guardian will be contacted.**

# advice and information

If you've got questions or concerns about cutting down or giving up, call **FRANK on 0800 77 66 00** 24 hours a day for friendly, confidential advice and information. Calls are free from landlines and some mobiles. There's also a textphone for the hard of hearing on **0800 917 8765**. Or go to **talktofrank.com**

## Adfam

Support materials for people with a family member who takes drugs. Can help you find local support groups.  
tel: 020 7533 7640  
email: [admin@adfam.org.uk](mailto:admin@adfam.org.uk)  
[www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

## Know cannabis

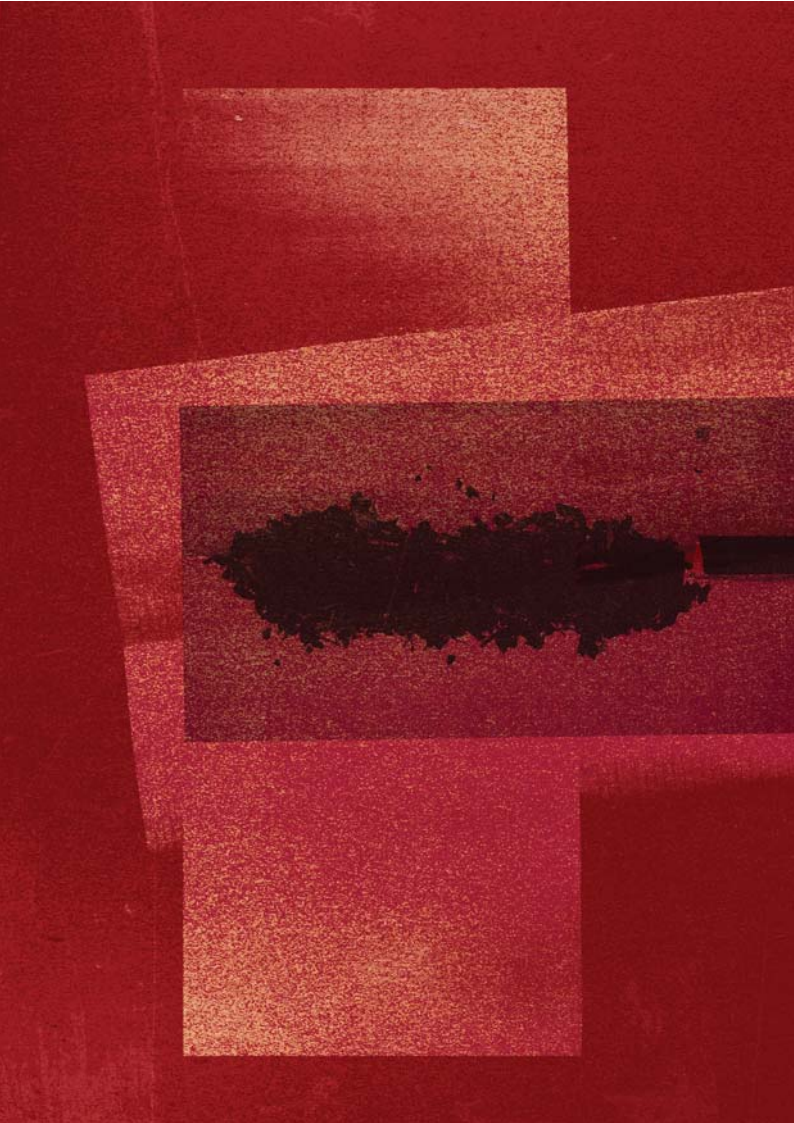
Information and self-help quiz for people to check out their cannabis use, its impact on their life and how to make changes.  
[www.knowcannabis.org.uk](http://www.knowcannabis.org.uk)

## Release

Provides expert advice and information on drugs, the law and human rights.  
tel: 0845 4500 215  
email: [ask@release.org.uk](mailto:ask@release.org.uk)  
[www.release.org.uk](http://www.release.org.uk)

## Giving up smoking

Sometimes the nicotine can be harder to give up than the cannabis. This site has advice and info about local services.  
tel: 0800 169 0 169  
[givingupsmoking.co.uk](http://givingupsmoking.co.uk)



# FRANK

**0800 77 66 00**  
**talktofrank.com**

FRANK is available in 120 languages, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Calls are free from landlines and some mobiles. You can talk to FRANK confidentially:

- > on **0800 77 66 00**
- > by textphone (for the hard of hearing)  
**0800 917 8765**
- > by emailing  
**frank@talktofrank.com**

FRANK can also tell you what services are available in your area.

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