

Simon's story

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I smoked weed heavily in my 20s – I'd be having about 30 bongs a day at one stage. Eventually, I started to feel like everyone else was moving on in their lives and I was still stuck in the same place, doing nothing. Stopping was pretty hard – I thought it'd be fine, but I had stomach pains and insomnia for a couple of months after I stopped. I actually thought I had some kind of stomach problem, and went to the doctor to get assessed for all kinds of things before I came clean about using cannabis. My doctor told me that was the most likely thing to be causing the problems, and got me to alter what I ate for a bit. That really helped. Wish I'd told her sooner though – one of the tests she sent me for was a colonoscopy. Google it.

I also found that my anxiety levels increased as I stopped smoking. They didn't really settle at all, so eventually my doctor suggested I go and see a psychologist to talk about it. It was a weird thing to do, as I've never really talked about myself to anyone, but the psychologist asked me to think about whether I'd actually been smoking weed to hide my feelings of anxiety, and I guess that definitely had something to do with it. The psychologist gave me some tips for dealing with anxiety, and they've helped too.

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Cannabis

Getting

support

 **UnitingCare**

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Getting started

What happens if you think your cannabis use is getting out of control? How do you know if it's a problem? Will people think you are stupid if you ask for help? How hard is it to stop using?

It can be a bit overwhelming when thinking about changing your use, but there are a number of different options available, including just talking to someone about where you're at and asking for advice about whether you need to change your cannabis use habits.

Your local alcohol and other drug service is a good place to start. They can chat with you about where you are at and where you want to be, and help you work out the best plan for getting there.

Changing your cannabis use

For most of us, giving up or cutting down our use of something we once enjoyed is not easy, even if we know that continuing with our current patterns of use isn't working for us. However, many people do successfully give up or reduce their cannabis use. Some do it on their own. Some need help along the way. One way to think of changing our behaviour is in terms of making a journey, travelling from where you are now to where you want to be. As with any journey, having a guide (or plan) makes arrival at your destination more likely and can make the journey a little easier.

Withdrawing from cannabis

People used to think that stopping cannabis use was as simple as just stopping, but we now know that there are a number of withdrawal symptoms people can experience. Some people compare the experience of cannabis withdrawal to tobacco withdrawal, but it's different for everyone. How long you've been smoking for, how much you smoke, and how you are feeling may all influence your withdrawal.

You may be able to manage your cannabis withdrawal at home on your own, or you may want additional support. A drug and alcohol service or your GP can help you to develop a withdrawal plan and work out what kind of supports you need. These services can also link you into longer-term support, e.g. counselling.

Most symptoms disappear within a couple of weeks, although sleep disruption can continue for longer.

Withdrawal symptoms you may experience

Generally, cannabis withdrawal symptoms peak in the first week. Common symptoms include: headaches, tiredness, vivid dreams or trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, nausea or diarrhea, aches and pains, sweating, anxiety, depression or irritability. You can also expect to experience cravings for cannabis.



Tips for getting through withdrawal

There are a number of things you can do to support yourself through the withdrawal process:

- If you experience nausea or stomach pain avoid greasy, fried food that may make you feel worse. Stick to light meals & snacks that will be easier for your body to digest.
- Stay hydrated – drink lots of water and juice, but avoid sugary drinks, caffeine and alcohol.
- Accept that sleep might be more difficult than normal – doing some gentle exercise during the day and then some relaxation exercises before bed can help you to wind down and feel tired enough to sleep. Your doctor may also be able to provide medication or suggest herbal remedies.
- Go easy on yourself! Most people have good days and bad days during withdrawal. Expect to feel strong cravings at times, as well as mood swings, feeling overwhelmed and feeling like it's all just too hard. Try and surround yourself with people who understand what you're trying to do and who will be encouraging and supportive.

What comes after withdrawal?

Withdrawal is an essential part of the process but on its own is no guarantee of ongoing success. Changing your thought processes and how you respond to different situations takes longer.

The more work you do on developing your skills to build on the changes you've made, and the stronger your support network is, the better you'll be at coping with the various challenges you'll face. Your alcohol and other drug worker will be able to help you identify the supports you already have in place and what you can do to provide yourself with the best chance of achieving your goals.