

**Quitting Pot –
Establishing Abstinence in Early Recovery:
16 Tips to Help You Quit and Stay Quit
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Ok, so you have decided that your life needs a little help and to accomplish this, you have decided to quit smoking pot. You have flushed or given away your stash. You have gotten rid of the paraphernalia. It has been a couple of days since you smoked pot and you're feeling cranky. You are not sleeping well. You feel anxious and jittery. You're sweaty; you're experiencing shakiness and you're sick at your stomach. You just don't feel good and you keep thinking that just a couple of hits from a joint will take the edge off.

Those detox symptoms will go away if you don't use. Detox symptoms and cravings go together like a hand in a glove. Cravings will go away if you don't use. Don't drink alcohol or do other drugs. Cravings can be a little more subtle. You might be thinking about drinking or using some other chemical or compulsive behavior in its place. Or you might be thinking about going to a bar and not using or drinking, or thinking about going to your friend's house where you used to use or buy drugs. These kinds of thoughts could be about subconsciously setting yourself to return to using.

Quitting cannabis or other drugs is easy. Staying quit is the hard part. Most people with addictions have been able to quit for brief periods of time. There are many things you can do to keep from returning to using. Here is a list of tips to prevent relapse:

1. Stay away from old smoking or drinking buddies. Delete their numbers from your cell phone.
2. Avoid places that set up visual, auditory, or olfactory cues that lead to cravings.
3. Stay busy. Find something to do. Engage in a highly distracting activity, (like puzzles, reading, solitaire, gardening, tinkering).
4. Don't think about quitting forever. Put it in a "one day at a time" context. Do what you have to do today to not use. Tomorrow, do the same thing.
5. Use hand to mouth substitutes, but don't take up cigarette smoking or overeating. Chew gum; gnaw on straws, keep a tooth pick in your mouth. Carry objects to fiddle with. Carry an NA keychain or an AA 24 hour chip and rub it.
6. Go to places where you would not have gone while getting high, or to places that you just never got around to going.
7. Practice new relaxation skills. Learn yoga or martial arts. Learn relaxation breathing.
8. Practice thought stopping. When you think about smoking pot, tell yourself to stop. Visualize a stop sign. Visualize a skull and cross-bones superimposed over the image of the pot.
9. Write out a list of all the pot you have ever used, from the beginning. Add in a history of your other drug use. Add in the financial consequences of your use. Then come up with a grand total of the cost of your drug abuse/addiction.

10. Practice cognitive therapy to challenge the cognitive distortions that have made it acceptable to return to using pot in the past. Identify your defense mechanisms. Challenge them one by one.
11. Reconnect with old friends that don't smoke pot or drink alcohol.
12. When you feel grief over the loss of the chemical, remind yourself of the negative aspects of using.
13. Tell the significant people in your life that you are quitting. Seek their support. Ask for help.
14. Talk about your feelings as they come up. Don't stuff them or act them out.
15. Explore new ways to have fun. Pick activities that are not usually associated with getting high.
16. Go to AA or NA. Get the phone number list. Call the people on the list when you want to use. Ask someone to be your sponsor. Read the literature. Pray and meditate.

You really can be addicted to marijuana. And to quit using and stay quit, most people require some level of treatment or help. To recover from marijuana addiction, abstinence must be established. Denial and other defense mechanisms that keep cognitive distortions in place that allow the addict to return to using must be eliminated. Cutting through denial is a process that occurs over time.

The earliest part of recovery is engaged in establishing and maintaining abstinence by preventing relapse. While most people need help in this process, most addicts have difficulty with admitting that they need help and in asking for that help. If you are trying to quit smoking pot, bite the bullet and ask for help.

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