

### Want support on the way?

**Forward Leeds** provide confidential, non-judgemental advice and support to help you make changes to your cannabis use.

You can call on **0113 887 2477**, or visit our website [ForwardLeeds.co.uk](http://ForwardLeeds.co.uk)

**UK SMART Recovery** - SMART Recovery helps participants decide whether they have a problem, builds up their motivation to change and offers a set of proven tools and techniques to support recovery. This is the SMART Recovery 4-point programme:

1. Building and maintaining motivation
2. Coping with urges
3. Managing thoughts, feelings and behaviours
4. Living a balanced life

[SmartRecovery.org.uk](http://SmartRecovery.org.uk)

**UKNA**. N.A. is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other.

[UKNA.org](http://UKNA.org)

Parts of this leaflet were adapted from **KFx**, a drug consultancy initiative. We thank them for permission to use materials. [KFx.org.uk](http://KFx.org.uk)

**MA-Online** - Marijuana Anonymous is a fellowship of people who share our experience, strength and hope with each other, that we may solve our common problem and help others to recover from pot addiction. [MA-Online.org](http://MA-Online.org)

### Other help:

#### Stopping smoking

**One You** - [OneYouLeeds.co.uk](http://OneYouLeeds.co.uk)

#### Mental health

**MindWell** - [Mindwell-Leeds.org.uk](http://Mindwell-Leeds.org.uk)

**Leeds Improving Access to**

**Psychological Therapies** -

[LeedsCommunityHealthcare.NHS.uk/iapt](http://LeedsCommunityHealthcare.NHS.uk/iapt)

#### More information about drugs

**Drugwise** - [DrugWise.org.uk](http://DrugWise.org.uk)

**Drugscience** - [DrugScience.org.uk](http://DrugScience.org.uk)

**Drugs & Me** - [DrugsAnd.me](http://DrugsAnd.me)

**Highway Code** - [GlobalDrugSurvey.com/Brand/The-Highway-Code](http://GlobalDrugSurvey.com/Brand/The-Highway-Code)

**Drugs Meter** - [DrugsMeter.com](http://DrugsMeter.com)

If you are not local to Leeds, the **Frank** website has a tool to find support services in your area.

[TalkToFrank.com/Need-Support](http://TalkToFrank.com/Need-Support)

For more details please visit

[ForwardLeeds.co.uk/RespectTHC](http://ForwardLeeds.co.uk/RespectTHC)

**0113 887 2477**

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# CANNABIS

[ForwardLeeds.co.uk/RespectTHC](http://ForwardLeeds.co.uk/RespectTHC)



**#RESPECT THC** 

# Across the world cannabis is one of the most widely used illicit drugs.

(Global Drug Survey, 2017)

In this same research, in the UK, 31.7% of people that said they used cannabis wanted to use less and some of those wanted help.

This booklet is a guide to cannabis, starting with the facts, then taking a look at you and your cannabis use, followed by a section on what to do next if you are looking to change something about your cannabis smoking.

## The science behind cannabis

There are over a hundred individual chemical compounds that are active in cannabis. These are known as cannabinoids. The two main ones that affect the brain are tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD).

THC is the chemical that gets you high and CBD minimizes the effects of being high.

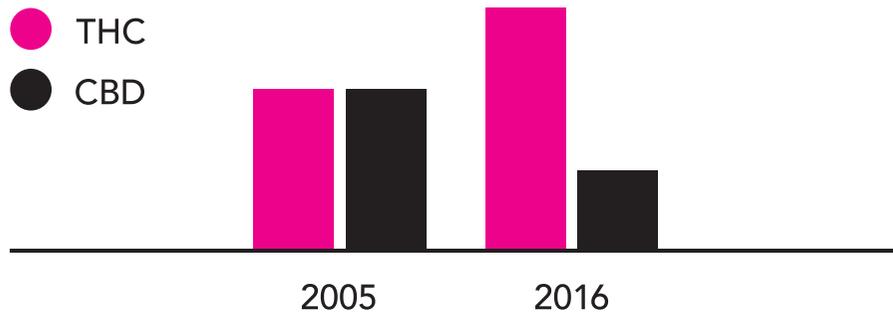
## How THC affects the brain

THC mainly causes changes in the amounts of chemicals in the brain that act on pleasure feelings and the "fight or flight" response and causes us to be more alert or anxious.

## How CBD affects the brain

CBD affects the areas of the brain responsible for pain management, pleasure and mood management. A lot of it make us happy, whereas a lack of it can make us depressed. Also, as mentioned before, CBD minimises the effects of THC. However this does not mean that CBD makes THC completely safe.

In essence, the high THC and low CBD ratio means a more "fight or flight" response and increases your chances of having a bad high.



Week Three – Well done – you are still working at achieving your goal and hopefully not far away, if you haven't already achieved it. What else do I need to do to get there?

Week 3	Time of day	Amount	Where / Who with	Mood before	Mood after	Cost
Mon						
Tues						
Wed						
Thurs						
Fri						
Sat						
Sun						

Reward yourself when things go well. Find other positive things to reward yourself with when you are doing well – it's important that you recognise positive changes, give yourself a pat on the back and give yourself a treat.

Week Four – Nearly there? Hopefully you are nearly there, or have reached your goal. If not, you are still trying, which is great. Put plans in place to help you for the last few days. If you are there think about what you need to do to maintain the changes.

Week 4	Time of day	Amount	Where / Who with	Mood before	Mood after	Cost
Mon						
Tues						
Wed						
Thurs						
Fri						
Sat						
Sun						

Use these diaries over the coming weeks to set your target and make your change.

Week One – What is my goal at the end of week one? – Think about what steps you need to take and how you can achieve this. Plan what steps you need to take to achieve it.

Week 1	Time of day	Amount	Where / Who with	Mood before	Mood after	Cost
Mon						
Tues						
Wed						
Thurs						
Fri						
Sat						
Sun						

Week Two – How did you get on in week one? Are there things that you need to do differently? What went well, and what didn't? Set yourself your goals for week two and work on these.

Week 2	Time of day	Amount	Where / Who with	Mood before	Mood after	Cost
Mon						
Tues						
Wed						
Thurs						
Fri						
Sat						
Sun						

## IS CANNABIS ADDICTIVE?

Yes, it is. For years it was thought that it had little to no potential to be addictive, however recent research suggests it is.

You can develop a tolerance (meaning taking more to get the same effect).

You can also experience withdrawal in the form of:

- Sleep difficulties
- Weight loss
- Aggression/irritability
- Vivid dreams
- Cravings
- Decreased appetite
- Feeling restless
- Anxiety
- Unsettled stomach

Addiction or dependency doesn't happen suddenly – usually a behaviour becomes habit forming first and the physical need will then develop over time – for more information see our section on Cannabis and Your Habits.

Source: "Cannabis and mental health" Royal College of Psychiatrists

[RCPsych.ac.uk/HealthAdvice/ProblemsAndDisorders/Cannabis.aspx](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/HealthAdvice/ProblemsAndDisorders/Cannabis.aspx)



# CANNABIS & YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

## Immediate effects:

When cannabis is smoked or vaporised the physical effects occur almost instantaneously (when eating cannabis the onset of effects is longer). The blood vessels in the eyes dilate causing the eyes to look 'bloodshot', the airways relax and expand; the heart rate increases and blood pressure drops.

- Using cannabis can cause nausea and vomiting, particularly in those who are not used to it. The risks of nausea and vomiting are increased if you are also using alcohol.
- Whilst intoxicated, cannabis impairs your thinking and motor skills. This will affect your judgement, coordination and reaction time, making it dangerous to perform certain tasks such as driving, operating machines or crossing the road.
- Research has found a link between dependent cannabis use before the age of 18 and low scores on IQ tests later in life. Evidence suggests that even if someone stops using cannabis after the age of 18 these effects cannot be reversed.

- Cannabis can impair cognitive development and functioning which can affect attention, memory and learning.

- Smoking cannabis is linked with bronchitis and lung disease. Cannabis smoke is carcinogenic therefore can cause lung-cancer and cancers of the mouth, throat, airways, testicles and bladder. The risks are increased if you smoke cannabis with tobacco as you are also subject to all of the health risks associated with tobacco smoking.

## OK, but I have heard that cannabis is a medicine?

There is increasing evidence that cannabis can be used to treat some medical conditions including the management of pain. This doesn't mean that cannabis is safe. Like any medication, unsupervised use is not advised as it can be dangerous to self-diagnose and self-medicate. In places where medical cannabis is legal, users are advised to avoid smoking cannabis as the physical health risks outweigh any potential health value.

The following questions will help you understand the physical side of your cannabis use:

Physical Health Markers	Yes	No
a) I use cannabis to help me cope with physical pain or other physical symptoms.		
b) When I stop using cannabis I experience aches, pains or other physical symptoms.		
c) I would consider my physical pain: mild/moderate (1 yes mark) / severe (2 yes marks) /extreme (3 yes marks)		

Score a point for each question you answered 'Yes' to. **Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

# MY PLAN

I have decided to stop using cannabis because...

My goal...

Hint: Be specific with your goal, for example to stop / reduce to one day a week / to have a month break.

When will I achieve this by?

Who will help me & how?

Hint: This could be practical, such as planning other activities away from cannabis or emotionally checking in with you around your mood.

What will I do to help with the mental health effects of change?

What will I do to help with the physical health effects of change?

What will I do to help with the habit effects of change?

What will I do to help with the social effects of change?



## TRIGGERS & CRAVINGS

Triggers are people, places, thoughts / feelings and things that make you want to use cannabis (ie triggers lead to cravings). Each time that you respond to your trigger by using cannabis it is reinforced.

As a result, it is really important that you look for ways to identify your triggers and have ways of dealing with them that are different.

### What are my triggers?

People	Places
Thoughts / feelings	Things
How can I respond differently?	

## TIPS FOR STOPPING

- If you want to stop – set a stop date, tell someone you trust that this is your plan and ask them to help you
- Choose a time when you think it will be good. For instance maybe when you have a few days off work so if you aren't sleeping as well its less of a problem Or a time when you know you will have less triggers.
- Have a plan for dealing with cravings – what will you do instead?
- Be prepared – as mentioned before, long term use of cannabis can mean when you stop you might have some

withdrawal symptoms (see page 3)

- The irritability, anxiety and problems with sleeping usually appear 10 hours after the last joint and peak at around one week after the last use of the drug.
- Tobacco mixed with cannabis can make it harder to stop. You can also get support to stop smoking if you think this will be a problem.
- Recognise that lapsing isn't failing, it is learning. If you do lapse, learn from it – why did you lapse and what can you do differently next time? Keep trying – it doesn't always happen first time.

## CANNABIS & YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

### Immediate effects:

- "High", relaxed (with lower THC levels), more intense colours, increased enjoyment of music, happiness, sleepiness.
- Cannabis with higher THC content can produce anxiety. Your mood and circumstance can mean that you could also experience confusion, hallucination and / or paranoia.

Some users can have severe negative symptoms such as hearing voices, seeing things that aren't there or having strange unsettling thoughts or beliefs -this can be described as psychosis. You may need immediate help if you are experiencing this.

### In the long term:

- Long term use of cannabis can cause irreversible cognitive effects.

- It can also reduce your motivation (meaning it is much harder to get out of the house, get to work etc).
- People also may experience symptoms of depression.
- Sleep-disorders, although at first cannabis can make you feel sleepy, over time, it can disturb your sleep patterns and how well rested you feel.

A 2018 study by Kings College London found: "regular users of high-potency cannabis carry the highest risk for psychotic disorders, compared to those who have never used cannabis."

If you have had symptoms of mental health issues, now or in the past, using any mind-altering substance increases your risks of a negative experience in the short and long term.

These questions will help you understand the mental health side of your cannabis use:

Mental Health Markers	Yes	No
a) I think my cannabis use helps me relax and chill out.		
b) I tend to get stressed when I haven't had a smoke.		
c) I have a problem with anger; cannabis helps me.		
d) I don't feel down or low when I have had a spliff.		
e) I have trouble sleeping if I haven't had a spliff.		
f) If I smell cannabis around me it makes me think strongly of having a spliff.		
g) I have bad thoughts or memories if I haven't had a smoke for a while		
h) My head really does me in if I haven't had a smoke – I get scared and panicky		

Score one point for questions (g) and (h) and half a point for the rest. **Total:** \_\_\_\_\_



## CANNABIS & YOUR SOCIAL LIFE

### Immediate effects:

- Can make you feel more relaxed in conversation, or have a more pleasant social experience
- You may feel more isolated even though you are around people.

### In the long term:

**Relationships** - A partner of a heavy cannabis user (even a tolerant partner) can feel neglected or excluded.

If your cannabis use is the main focus of your life then ultimately your partner, family member or close friend is always going to feel like second best.

**Finances** - Cannabis costs money. The occasional user may liken the cost to a more standard treat, like meal out or a bit of retail therapy. However the chronic user can spend a lot of money on cannabis and when the cost starts to impact on life and depletes the family budget, an obvious strain is put on the relationship.

**Life Avoidance & Personal Habits** - They may look to cannabis as the first recourse to

life's problems. Some cannabis users adopt or slip into poor personal habits. They can neglect personal hygiene and carry the smell of cannabis on their hair, clothing or breath.

**Work life** - Some studies have drawn a link between heavy cannabis use and adverse consequences in the workplace, such as an increased likelihood of injury or accident.

One study done on postal workers in the US found that those workers who tested positive for cannabis had 55% more industrial accidents, 85% more accidents and 75% more absenteeism than non-cannabis using employees. Drug testing is becoming increasingly prevalent in the workplace. A positive test is likely to haunt an employee for a long time as it follows them through the reference process.

Whilst it is true that not every cannabis user will lose their job, it is a fact that the sense of lethargy and short term memory problems associated with heavy use is very likely to have a negative impact on all aspects of a person's life.

Social Markers	Yes	No
a) Most of my friends use cannabis.		
b) My partner smokes cannabis.		
c) Other family members smoke cannabis.		
d) Cannabis is a feature of many of my social activities.		
e) I would find it difficult to tell my friends I was going to stop smoking cannabis.		
f) I don't have any close friends who don't use cannabis.		
g) I use cannabis when I am out socially.		
h) I would feel out of place being with my friends if I wasn't using cannabis.		
i) I feel quite socially isolated – cannabis is one of my best friends.		
j) I find it easier to be sociable when I have used cannabis.		

Score half a point for each question you answered 'Yes' to. **Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

## MAKING CHANGES

Making changes isn't always easy, even if they are for the right reasons. You will find that you will gain things. For instance, you might find that you do more or have more free time. You might find that you have more energy. Think about how your changes are having a positive effect upon your life.

There will also be things that you lose. For instance, there might be people you don't want to see as much of, or social

groups that you suddenly feel a bit less part of. This is natural and it takes time to readjust. It is really important that you think about what you feel you are losing and put things in place to fill that gap. Recognise that it will take some time to readjust fully to the changes that you make. Keep focused on the positive aspects, fill any gaps that are appearing and think about what you are gaining and not what you are losing.

## READY TO TAKE ACTION?

### Tips for changing your cannabis use

- Avoid using during the day. The cannabis joint that gets you most stoned is the first one of the day. Using first thing in the morning leads to the development of tolerance throughout the day and increases the risk of dependence
- Leave your days free from cannabis—you'll get more stuff done and want less cannabis in the evenings.
- Take a break – taking a few days, weeks or a month off will help prevent cannabis becoming habit forming
- Set limits on the amount you use. Setting a limit for how much you use might help keep your use under control

and reduce your risk of developing tolerance and other cannabis related harms. It also means you might get other stuff done.

- There's no need to buy more than you need thinking you will save some for tomorrow—you probably won't. The more you break up the pattern of use the easier it is to control your use of cannabis and reduce the risks.
- Recognise your triggers. Think about what makes you want to use and find alternative ways of responding. For example if you use cannabis to help you relax, think about what else might work to help you relax and try that out.



## LOOKING FOR A PATTERN

Use the diary below to help you monitor your cannabis use. Think about how much cannabis you consume; is this a normal week? And what are the triggers behind your use – how can you overcome these?

	Time of day	Amount	Where / Who with	Mood before	Mood after	Cost
Mon						
Tues						
Wed						
Thurs						
Fri						
Sat						
Sun						

## CANNABIS & YOUR HABITS

There are some things that we do occasionally with no pattern such as going to the cinema, dropping a plate or answering a phone.

Cannabis use generally starts as a similar situation, with no pattern to it, i.e. having a smoke occasionally with friends. For some people a pattern starts to form. For example; having a smoke before bed, having a smoke whenever in a certain place, and/or thinking about when that next smoke will be.

Whenever a pattern starts to form you may feel some discomfort when things fall out of that pattern. This might include

going away for the weekend with family members that don't know you smoke; that worrying feeling that you won't be able to have your usual bedtime smoke.

If you are noticing a pattern or a feeling of enjoyment from the ritual of smoking – rolling or preparing your cannabis - then this can be a sign that you are developing a habit.

Being aware that a pattern is starting is a chance to stop a habit from developing.

With any habit, they can feel difficult to break, but it is very possible to break them! (See Tips for stopping)

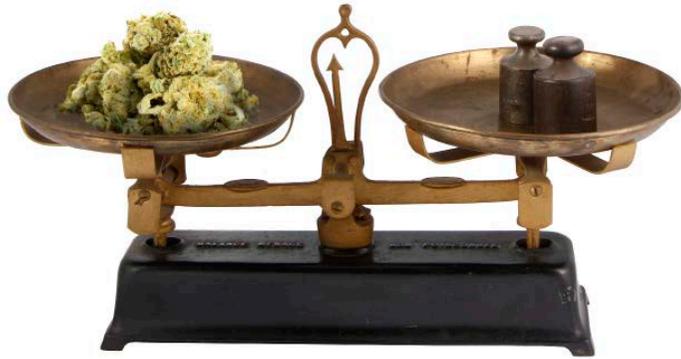
Ritual Markers	Yes	No
a) I tend to use cannabis at regular times of the day.		
b) I tend to use cannabis at regular points of the week.		
c) I find the process of preparing a spliff or pipe very enjoyable.		
d) If I'm at home I tend to use in the same rooms, sit in the same places or do the same things.		
e) I have strong likes and dislikes in terms of the papers, pipes or bongs I use.		
f) I think about having spliffs at various points in the day.		
g) If I am going to be away from home I think about how I would fit in using cannabis.		
h) If I miss one of my regular spliffs I feel put out.		

Score one point for questions (a) & (h) and half a point for all the other questions.

**Total:** \_\_\_\_\_



# MEASURING UP



## What impact does cannabis have on my life?

Put your scores from the previous section in the table below to see if there are any signs of dependence on cannabis in each aspect of your life

	Physical Health	Mental Health	Social	Ritual
Score				

**Physical Field:** A score of less than two in the physical field suggests that you will not experience any significant physical discomfort when you stop using cannabis. A score of two or more means you may experience some physical distress. The higher this score is, the more likely that the underlying causes of your physical pain or a professional assessment of your pain management will be needed to help you stop using cannabis.

**Mental Health Field:** You may need to develop alternative ways of coping with stress and anger, and find ways to get to sleep. If you have answered yes to (g) and (h) you may well benefit from professional help to explore underlying issues that may be distressing you. With a score of two or more here, seeking professional help from Forward Leeds is likely to be useful.

**Social Field:** A score of two or more here suggests that cannabis is socially important to you. Your plan for stopping cannabis use will need to take on board how you will cope with family and/or friends who use, and how you will cope socially without cannabis.

**Ritual Field:** The higher the score here, the more strongly you have developed a pattern of cannabis use with rituals and habits. These patterns will need to be spotted and changed. You can use your cannabis diary to help understand your patterns. Then change your daily routines and make sure you are occupied during times you associate with cannabis use. If you have a score of three or more in this field it may be helpful to discuss this with a worker at Forward Leeds who can help you change your patterns.

# MAKING A DECISION

Filling out these boxes will help you to get a better idea of the balance of cannabis in your life.

What do I gain from cannabis?	What don't I like about cannabis?
What are the not so good things about changing my cannabis use?	What would be better if I changed my cannabis use?