A GUIDE TO CUTTING DOWN AND STOPPING CANNABIS USE
If you’re considering cutting down your cannabis use, this booklet can help. It has practical tips to help you manage any problems you meet in using less cannabis – or it can help you to quit completely.

Please remember: cannabis is still an illegal drug.
Do I really have a problem with cannabis?

Some people use cannabis without serious problems. They seem able to stop when they choose. Others find it hard even to cut down, never mind stop.

Some users become dependent on cannabis in a similar way to other drugs. Using it most days, over several months or more, can result in psychological dependency.

After smoking for an extended period, you may find you now need to smoke more than you used to, to get the same feeling or even just to feel OK. People using cannabis heavily often say they have problems in various areas of their life - money worries, difficult relationships, conflict with family and friends, struggling to manage work or study commitments, ill-health - especially chest illnesses - and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia.
"Are you saying I'm dependent?"

In general, the symptoms of dependence are:

- Using more, or for longer, than you meant to
- A constant desire to use, or trying to give it up and failing
- Spending a lot of time getting supplies, using and recovering
- Spending less time on important activities or giving them up altogether
- Keeping on using, even when you know it's harming you
- Tolerance (needing more of the drug to get the same effect)
- Withdrawal (unpleasant symptoms when you stop)

Having one or more of these problems does not prove you are dependent. But, if you are concerned about any of them, you might consider reducing or stopping your use.

Want to find out more about your cannabis use?
Go to the Know Cannabis website and do the 5-minute online self-assessment quiz – www.knowcannabis.org.uk
It’s confidential – you don’t need to give your name or where you live.
If you want to cut down or stop your cannabis use, take it a step at a time:

1. Think about changing
2. Plan for the change you want
3. Act on your decision
4. Have a back-up plan

1. THINK ABOUT CHANGING

Why do you smoke cannabis? Why do you want to cut down or stop? The first step is to work out your answers to these questions. Some positive things (pros) about using cannabis might be:

- A sense of well-being
- Having fun and socialising with friends
- The feeling of relaxation
- Time out
- Increased creativity and enhanced senses
- It's something you share with your boyfriend, girlfriend or partner
Some negative things (cons) about using cannabis might be:

**Short-term**

- Anxiety or paranoia.
- Memory and concentration problems.
- Increased risk of accidents – especially if you drink alcohol as well. Don’t drive or operate machinery at work when you are stoned.
- Bizarre thoughts, extreme paranoia or hallucinations. If you or your family have any history of mental illness you are more at risk of experiencing serious problems. Talk to your GP about any psychological and mental health issues.
- Problems with your employer or the authorities over using an illegal drug.
- Frequent cannabis use during pregnancy may help cause premature birth. Babies may also temporarily suffer tremor and distress.
Increased risk of throat or lung diseases – such as bronchitis and lung, throat or mouth cancers – especially if you also smoke tobacco.

Dependence – it makes things worse if you can’t do without it.

Financial problems – spending more, earning less.

Social isolation – long-term smokers often say they don’t mix with other people as much as they used to.

Less motivation – people dependent on cannabis struggle to achieve their goals and say they regret wasted time and opportunities.

Less concentration; less ability to learn or remember things.

Existing mental health problems, will be made worse by using cannabis. Cannabis can also trigger serious mental health problems in some people (e.g. people who have had mental health problems before, or who have a history of mental problems in their family such as schizophrenia). See your GP or contact a helpline to discuss any serious mental health worries you have.