

KNOWING YOUR LIMITS WITH CANNABIS

**A Practical Guide
to Assessing Your
Cannabis Use**



Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

Evidence. Engagement. Impact.

Acknowledgements

Knowing Your Limits with Cannabis: A Practical Guide to Assessing Your Cannabis Use was originally developed and distributed by David Brown, PhD, of Pathways Research. CCSA has obtained all rights to the guide and is responsible for the current updated version. The guide is available free of charge. The guide can only be modified with written copyright permission and acknowledgement. This statement must be included if the guide is reused in any format.

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About the Guide

This guide has been developed to help you think about your cannabis use and to provide you with information about cannabis. It has tips and tools that can help you reduce your cannabis use or help you address some of the health risks of using cannabis.

You can use the guide on your own or with support and guidance from a healthcare professional such as a doctor, nurse or counsellor.

Keep in mind that this guide is only a self-assessment and reflection resource. It is **not** a tool for identifying, diagnosing or treating a cannabis use disorder.

If you ever feel that you need help with your cannabis use, please reach out for support from your healthcare provider or check out [Wellness Together Canada](#) and [Finding Quality Addiction Care in Canada](#).

Who Is the Guide For?

This guide has been designed for people 18 years and older who would like to reflect on their cannabis use. Although not designed specifically for youth, it may be used by people under 18 with the guidance and support of a healthcare professional or counsellor.

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1



PART ONE

THINKING ABOUT CANNABIS USE

When people encounter the word cannabis, they often think of the dried greenish-to-brownish product of the plant, usually called marijuana, pot or weed.

But cannabis can be used to make a wide range of products that differ in their:

- Appearance and consistency
- Taste and smell
- Amount of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol)
- Amount of CBD (cannabidiol)
- Method of use

Cannabis products belong in one of three categories:

1. Dried cannabis
2. Cannabis extracts
3. Edible cannabis or edibles

Each type of cannabis product may have different benefits, and pose different health and safety risks.

Cannabis topicals are a fourth category, but since they do not present the risks and harms of the other categories, they will not be covered in this guide.

THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) is the primary component of cannabis that produces the high. The potency of cannabis depends on how much THC it contains.

CBD (cannabidiol) does not produce a high but can cause drowsiness. CBD is being researched for its potential medical application.

Types of Cannabis Products

The table below lists some of the more common products and ways they can be used. The table also shows the wide range of THC and CBD concentrations contained in different cannabis products.

While many strains of cannabis exist, including sativa, indica and hybrid, research shows that different strains do not produce different effects. A more important indicator of effects are the levels of THC and CBD.

The more THC in a product the greater the risk of experiencing negative mental and physical health outcomes.

Category of product	Type or format	Methods of use	THC & CBD Concentrations or amounts
Dried cannabis (herbal cannabis, flower, bud)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- loose bud- pre-rolled	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- smoked- vaped or vaporized	THC: 0% to 30% CBD: 0% to 20%
Cannabis extracts (including concentrates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- hash (hashish)- shatter- wax, budder- vape cartridges- oil sprays, tinctures- capsules	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- vaped or vaporized- ingested- smoked	THC: 0% to 95% CBD: 0% to 84%
Edible cannabis (including beverages)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- chocolate- brownies- soft candies (gummies)- sparkling water, soda- juice, tea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- ingested	THC: 0 to 10 mg/unit CBD: 0 to 25 mg/unit

Adapted from *Clearing the Smoke on Cannabis: Edible Cannabis Products, Cannabis Extracts and Cannabis Topicals*

Inhaling Compared to Ingesting Cannabis

Whether cannabis is **inhaled** or **ingested** will influence **when** and for **how long** the effects (the high) of cannabis are felt.


Cannabis: Inhaling vs Ingesting

To lower your risk of the harmful effects of cannabis, you need to understand the differences between the two most common ways of consuming it.

INHALING

— smoking or vaping —


Cannabis smoke or vapour delivers THC, the chemical that gets you high, into your lungs where it passes directly into your bloodstream and then your brain.



INGESTING

— eating or drinking —

Edible cannabis travels first to your stomach then to your liver before getting into your bloodstream and brain. The liver converts THC into a stronger form and this combined with the THC from the original product adds to the intensity of the high.




You will feel the effects from **seconds to a few minutes** of inhaling.


Full effects can peak within **30 minutes**.

Effects can last up to **6 hours** after use. Some residual effects can last up to **24 hours**.


START OF EFFECTS



PEAK EFFECTS



LENGTH OF EFFECTS



You will feel effects within **30 minutes to 2 hours** of ingesting.

Full effects can peak within **4 hours**.

Effects can last up to **12 hours** after use. Some residual effects can last up to **24 hours**.

The Spectrum of Cannabis Use

Cannabis use, like the use of alcohol and other substances, exists on a spectrum. This means that cannabis use can be different for everyone at any given time. Anyone can move back and forth along the spectrum in their lifetime.

Consider the information below and think about where you might fit. This is **not** a diagnosis. It is just meant to help you reflect on your cannabis use.

1. Abstinence

Choosing to abstain from or not use cannabis to avoid all health risks or for other personal reasons

Example: A person who has chosen to never begin using cannabis or who has quit using cannabis.

2. Beneficial Use

Use that might have some positive impact, either physically, mentally, socially or spiritually

Example: A person who has been authorized to use cannabis for medical purposes by a healthcare provider.

3. Non-Problematic Use

Cannabis use that might have negligible health and social impacts

Example: A person who uses cannabis occasionally (e.g., weekly or less) and follows the Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (see page 11)

4. Problematic Use

Cannabis use that begins to affect a person's health and interferes with their school, work, family, social or financial responsibilities

Example: A person who continues to use cannabis daily or almost daily despite the negative impact on their mental or physical health.

5. Cannabis Use Disorder

Cannabis use that has led to dependence or addiction to cannabis

Example: A person who has persistent cravings for cannabis and has a hard time reducing or controlling their cannabis use (see page 8).

Assessing Your Cannabis Use

On the next page, you will find a short questionnaire called the Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test – Revised (CUDIT-R).¹

The CUDIT-R is a commonly used tool that measures whether a person's cannabis use might be lower-risk or potentially risky or problematic.

Here, the term “cannabis” refers to any product listed in the Types of Cannabis Products section (page 2). This includes your use of any dried cannabis, cannabis extract and cannabis edible products.

¹Adamson, S. J., Kay-Lambkin, F. J., Baker, A. L., Lewin, T. J., Thornton, L., Kelly, B. J., & Sellman, J. D. (2010). An improved brief measure of cannabis misuse: The Cannabis Use Disorders Identification Test-Revised (CUDIT-R). *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 110(1–2), 137–143. Reprinted with permission from Elsevier.

CUDIT-R

Have you used cannabis over the past six months?

YES / NO

If **YES**, please answer the following questions about your cannabis use. Circle the response that is most correct for you in relation to your cannabis use over the past six months:

1 How often do you use cannabis?

Never 0	Monthly or less 1	2-4 times a month 2	2-3 times a week 3	4 or more times a week 4
------------	----------------------	------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------------

2 How many hours were you “stoned” on a typical day when you had been using cannabis?

Less than 1 0	1 or 2 1	3 or 4 2	5 or 6 3	7 or more 4
------------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	----------------

3 How often during the past 6 months did you find that you were not able to stop using cannabis once you had started?

Never 0	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
------------	------------------------	--------------	-------------	----------------------------

4 How often during the past 6 months did you fail to do what was normally expected from you because of using cannabis?

Never 0	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
------------	------------------------	--------------	-------------	----------------------------

5 How often in the past 6 months have you devoted a great deal of your time to getting, using or recovering from using cannabis?

Never 0	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
------------	------------------------	--------------	-------------	----------------------------

6 How often in the past 6 months have you had a problem with your memory or concentration after using cannabis?

Never 0	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
------------	------------------------	--------------	-------------	----------------------------

7 How often do you use cannabis in situations that could be physically hazardous, such as driving, operating machinery or caring for children?

Never 0	Less than monthly 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily or almost daily 4
------------	------------------------	--------------	-------------	----------------------------

8 Have you ever thought about cutting down or stopping your use of cannabis?

Never 0	Yes, but not in the past 6 months 2	Yes, during the past 6 months 4
------------	--	------------------------------------

To calculate your score, add up all the numbers that you circled.

**Your
score**

Check the table below to see what your score means.

NOTE: Your score is **not a diagnosis**. It is only meant for you to assess and reflect on your cannabis use.

0 to 7

LOW

Your cannabis use might be lower risk.

Consider reviewing the Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (see page 11).

8 to 11

MEDIUM

Your cannabis use might be risky or problematic.

Consider following the Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (see page 11).

12+

HIGH

You might be experiencing symptoms of a cannabis use disorder (see next page).

Consider seeking advice and support from a healthcare provider or addiction treatment professional. Additional resources can be found on page 34.

Cannabis Use Disorder

Cannabis is an addictive substance and people who use cannabis can become dependent on it. Cannabis dependence is medically known as **cannabis use disorder**. A cannabis use disorder can be mild, moderate or severe.

Signs and symptoms of cannabis use disorder include:

- Using more cannabis than planned
- Trying unsuccessfully to control use
- Spending a significant amount of time getting and using cannabis or recovering from its effects
- Experiencing a strong desire or urge to use cannabis
- Failing to meet major obligations at work, home or school because of cannabis use
- Giving up or reducing important social, work or recreational activities because of cannabis use
- Continuing use despite recurring physical or psychological problems caused by cannabis
- Continuing to use cannabis despite it causing problems in relationships
- Using cannabis in physically dangerous situations
- Increasing tolerance to cannabis' effects
- Developing withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, sleep disorders, anxiety, aggression, decreased appetite, weight loss and restlessness
- Other withdrawal symptoms include sweating, stomach pain, chills, shakiness and depression

If you think you are experiencing symptoms of a cannabis use disorder, please seek the advice and support of a healthcare professional.

Cannabis Use and Your Health

Regular cannabis use can lead to **dependence** or a **cannabis use disorder**. Regular use refers to weekly or more frequent cannabis use for long periods of time (i.e., months to years).

But you don't have to be dependent on cannabis to experience health problems. Using cannabis regularly can:

- Affect your **concentration, memory** and **decision making**
- Interfere with your **work** or **school, family** and **social responsibilities**
- Worsen symptoms of **depression** and **anxiety**
- Increase your risk of developing **psychosis** and **schizophrenia**
- Can affect how the **brain develops**, especially if you start using cannabis at a young age before the brain has fully developed

Cannabis smoke has many of the same toxic chemicals and fine particles as tobacco smoke. Smoking cannabis regularly can lead to:

- **Coughing, wheezing, sore throat, chest tightness** and **hoarse voice**

Vaping illegal cannabis extracts has been associated with **severe lung illnesses**.

Using cannabis during pregnancy and while breastfeeding may lead to:

- **Low birth weight, and behavioural and neurodevelopmental problems**

What Influences Your Risk Level?

Cannabis use can affect everyone's health differently. A person's level of risk depends on the factors listed below.

1. Strength (THC) of cannabis product

Example: Using higher strength (more than 10% THC) cannabis products

2. Frequency of use

Example: Using cannabis daily or almost daily

3. Method of use

Example: Smoking cannabis can increase the risk of breathing problems

4. Age of first use

Example: Starting to use cannabis regularly before the age of 25 (before one's brain has fully developed)

5. Personal history of mental health conditions

Example: Using cannabis while experiencing depression or anxiety

6. Family history of mental health conditions

Example: Using cannabis despite having a family or personal history of psychosis or schizophrenia

CANADA'S LOWER-RISK CANNABIS USE GUIDELINES

Choose not to use. The only way to completely avoid the risks of cannabis is choosing not to use it.

Avoid inhaling deeply or holding your breath. If you choose to smoke cannabis, avoid deep inhalations and holding your breath as this increases the amount of toxins absorbed in your lungs.

Delay using cannabis. Using cannabis early in life increases the risk for cannabis-related health problems. If you decide to use, choose to start later in life.

Limit your cannabis use. Limiting your use to occasional use, such as once a week, can reduce health risks.

Choose low-strength products. If you use, choose products with a lower THC content or a higher ratio of CBD to THC.

Avoid driving or operating machinery. Cannabis use impairs your ability to drive a motor vehicle or operate other machinery. The effects of cannabis can last 6 hours or longer.

Don't use synthetic cannabis products. Avoid synthetic forms of cannabis, such as K2 and Spice. These products can lead to severe health problems.

Don't use cannabis if there's a personal or family history of psychosis. Cannabis should be avoided if you have problems with other substances or if you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

Avoid smoking cannabis. Smoking is the most harmful way of using cannabis because it directly affects your lungs. Other forms such as edible cannabis can take longer to affect your system. Be careful not to use too much.

More research is needed to understand the health effects of vaporizers and edibles. They are not without risk.

Avoid mixing cannabis with the use of alcohol or other drugs. Avoid combining the risk factors mentioned above.

For more information about the
Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines, see
10 Ways to Reduce Risks to Your Health When Using Cannabis.

Let's Look at Your Cannabis Likes and Dislikes

What are the **main reasons** you use cannabis?

1.
2.

What do you **like** about cannabis?

1.
2.

In what ways has cannabis been **helpful** for you?

1.
2.

What do you **dislike** about cannabis?

1.
2.

In what ways has cannabis been **unhelpful** or **harmful** for you?

1.
2.

Moving Toward Change

Not everyone may be thinking about changing their cannabis use. If you are, take time to think about some of the reasons you may want to change your use and some of the challenges you might experience.

What are some reasons you might want to reduce your use of cannabis?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> To avoid memory problems | <input type="checkbox"/> To avoid injuries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To reduce health risks | <input type="checkbox"/> To spend less money |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To have better relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> To do better at work or school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

What are some challenges you think you might experience if you try to reduce your use of cannabis?

Thinking About Change

We've looked at what you like and dislike about using cannabis.

And we've talked about different ways of using cannabis and their levels of risk to your mental and physical health.

From your perspective, how **important** is it for you to reduce how much you use cannabis?

0

1

2

3

4

5

Not very important

Very important

How **ready** are you to begin reducing how much you use cannabis?

0

1

2

3

4

5

Not very ready

Very ready

To help you decide how ready you are, you might ask yourself:

1. Am I unsatisfied with how much I use cannabis and the effects on my health, life and relationships?
2. Have I begun considering what kind of change I'd like to make?
3. Have I begun thinking about a possible plan or approach to reducing my use?
4. Have I begun thinking about what supports I'll need along the way?

It's Your Choice

You have a wide range of options to choose from.

For example, you could...

Option 1 — Follow the Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines

Option 2 — Start a conversation with your healthcare provider or counsellor about other changes you could make to reduce your risks

Option 3 — Cut back on how often you use cannabis or how much cannabis you use

Option 4 — Take a break from cannabis use for a period of time

Option 5 — Stop using cannabis altogether

Option 6 — Carry on with using cannabis the way you do now

Which of these feels like the best choice for you? Record your choice below and on the top of page 21.

If you're thinking about cutting back on your cannabis use or how much cannabis you use (option 3), say by how much. (Example: Reduce use to no more than 1-2 days per week)

I'm going to...

1.

2.

Tips for Reducing Cannabis Use



PLAN AHEAD

If certain people or places lead you to use cannabis more than you want to, then avoid them. If using at home is a problem, don't have cannabis in the house. When an urge to use hits, accept that it will crest like a wave and pass. Remind yourself of your reasons for reducing your use, and focus on healthier ways to spend your time.



FIND FUN

Get involved with an activity that doesn't involve cannabis. Fill free time with hobbies and family and friends that make you feel good. If you used cannabis to help you feel comfortable in social situations or to cope with stress, explore new techniques and strategies. This can include breathing exercises, meditation, yoga or replacing negative self-talk with positive self-talk.



PACE YOURSELF

If you do use on one day, skip using for at least the next day. An important part of reducing your use is to break the pattern of daily use. The personal cannabis tracker is a tool (page 19) that you can use to help track and manage this.

Tips for Reducing Your Cannabis Risks

Even if you're not ready to reduce your cannabis use, there are still things you can do to reduce the health risks of cannabis use.



DON'T MIX

Try not to use cannabis with alcohol or other drugs. Cannabis can interact with other substances in ways that may lead to unwanted side effects. It is also a good idea to avoid using cannabis if you're taking certain over-the-counter and prescription medications.

To learn more, check out these resources [Cannabis and Other Substances](#) and [Cannabis and Your Medications](#) at ccsa.ca/cannabis.



DON'T DRIVE

Don't drive or operate heavy machinery when using cannabis. Cannabis can interfere with your thinking and motor skills that can make it difficult for you to drive. Cannabis use doubles your risk of a crash. This risk is even higher when you use cannabis and alcohol at the same time.



BUY LEGAL

Cannabis that you get from a dealer or other illegal source is not regulated. This means that you don't know if it's contaminated with harmful chemicals, pesticides, mould and other substances. Legal cannabis products are strictly regulated and tested for quality and safety. Reduce your risk by purchasing cannabis from legal and regulated sources. Look for the following symbols to ensure your products are from legal and regulated sources.



Things to Remember



1

For the next two weeks, keep track of how often you are using cannabis with the tracking tool on the next page.

2





Notice how cannabis affects your mood and relationships.

3

Understand and deal with things that may be getting in the way of changing.

4

Accept support from your doctor, nurse, friend, peer worker or someone else you trust.



Personal Tracker

Keep track of your cannabis use for the next two weeks.
On the days you use cannabis, add a check (✓).

MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY

WEEK 1			DATE:			

Main reasons for use:

.....

MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY

WEEK 2			DATE:			

Main reasons for use:

.....

Record What You Learn

As you track your cannabis use, keep in mind the things you learn by recording them below.

How has using cannabis affected your mood and sense of well-being?

How has using cannabis affected your relationships with other people?

What have you learned that might make it easier for you to use cannabis less or with lower risk in the future?

END OF PART ONE

BUILDING ON PAST TWO WEEKS EXPERIENCE

In Part One (page 15), you chose the following option:

What Worked and What Didn't?

Whether you made your planned changes or not, you may have had some difficult situations.

When taking steps to use cannabis less, what steps didn't work as well as you wanted?

When taking steps to use cannabis less, what steps worked well for you?

In What Situations Was It Harder to Use Cannabis Less?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parties | <input type="checkbox"/> When feeling frustrated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weekends | <input type="checkbox"/> When feeling bored |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> When feeling depressed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> When feeling lonely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrations | <input type="checkbox"/> When feeling nervous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling happy | <input type="checkbox"/> When feeling angry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> With meals | <input type="checkbox"/> When feeling stressed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When drinking | <input type="checkbox"/> When arguing |

☐

☐

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Thinking About Change

How **much** have you been able to reduce your use of cannabis so far?

0

1

2

3

4

5

Less than I planned

As much as I planned

More than I planned

How **important** is it for you to keep working on using cannabis less?

0

1

2

3

4

5

Not very important

Very important

How **ready** are you to keep working on using cannabis less?

0

1

2

3

4

5

Not very ready

Very ready

What cannabis use changes do you want to work on **NOW**?

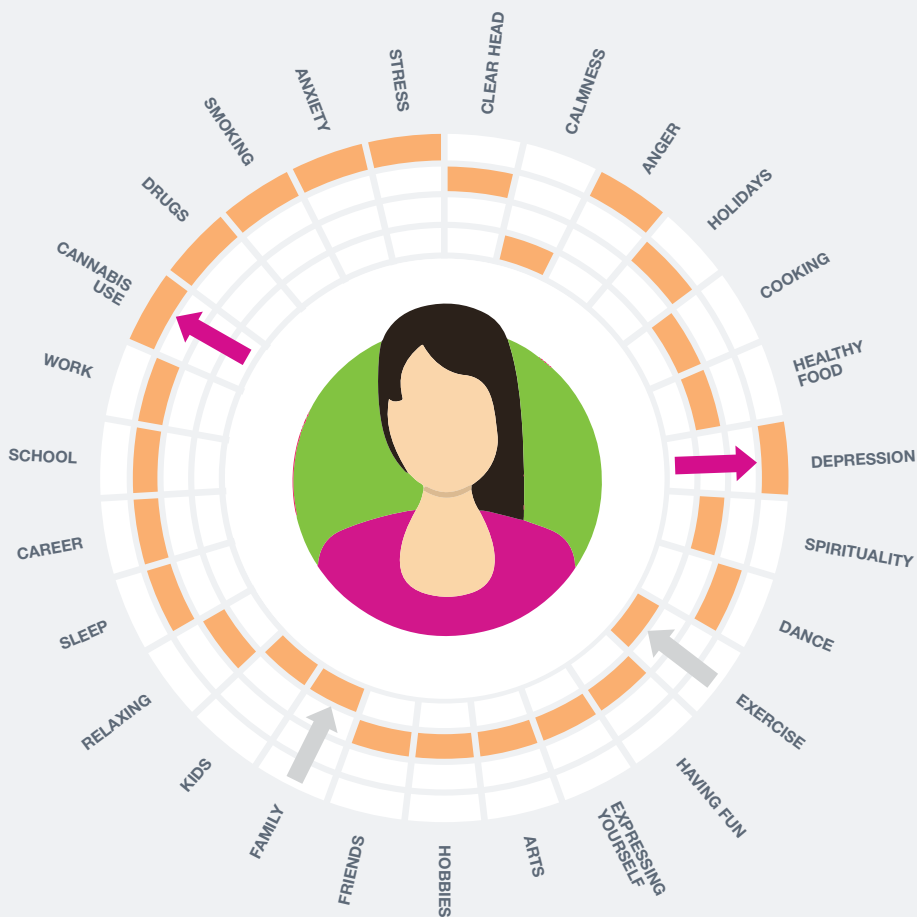
- ☐ I want to work toward the same goals as before.
- ☐ I want to work on maintaining the changes I've already succeeded in making.
- ☐ I want to ...

What things could you do now to help you reach these goals? Are there any ideas from what you recorded on page 20?

Change is hard.
It takes time and can be slow at first.
That's OK.

The BIG Picture

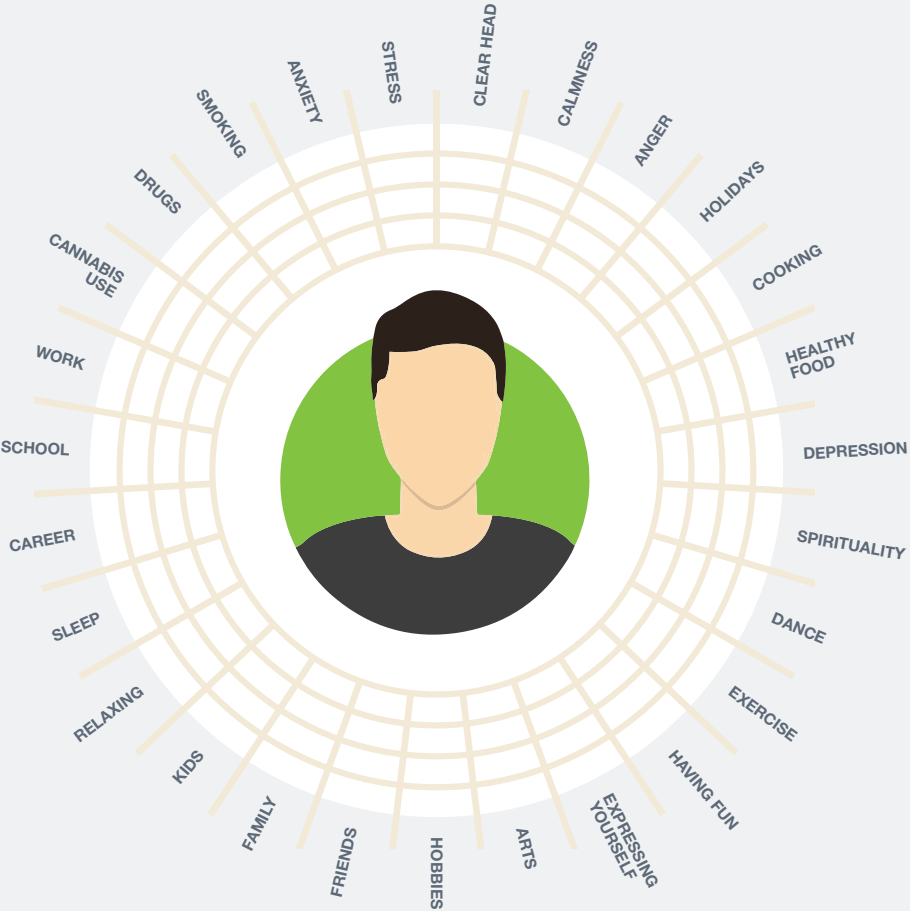
Managing your cannabis use is easier if you work toward healthier living overall. Have a look at the example below of a completed lifestyle chart and then use the blank chart on the next page to complete your own. This person wants to push some things away from the centre of her life, such as depression and cannabis use. She also wants to bring some things closer to the centre of her life, such as family and exercise.



What's Important to You?

Shade in the boxes closer to you for the things that you would like to make a larger part of your life.

Shade in the boxes further away from you for the things that you would like to make a smaller part of your life. Keep this BIG picture in mind as you reflect on your cannabis use whether you want to continue to use or you want to work on reducing your use of cannabis.



Be Ready to Say “No Thanks”

If you're looking to change your cannabis use, planning for comfortable ways to deal with pressure can help you stay on track. Some reasons you could use include:

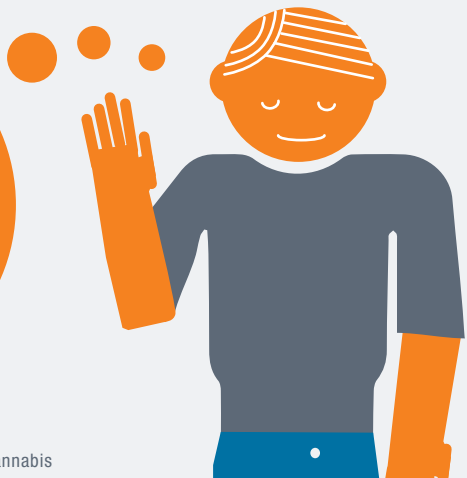
- “No thanks, I’m driving.”
- “I told my family I would cut down.”
- “My doctor says I shouldn’t use cannabis while taking medication.”

Think of what you can say if you are offered cannabis.

When people offer me cannabis, I will say:

When offered cannabis,
you might say,

“No thanks! I’m
driving tonight.”



Reward Yourself

It helps to reward yourself when making hard changes. By using cannabis less, you are saving time and money that you can now use for other things.

For example, you can spend more time with friends and family, exercise, explore a new sport or activity, or volunteer in your community.

How many **hours** each week did you usually spend on getting or using cannabis before starting to use less?

<input type="text"/>	HOURS
----------------------	-------

What will you do with the **time** you are saving now by using cannabis less?

How many **dollars** each week did you usually spend on cannabis before starting to use less?

<input type="text"/>	DOLLARS
----------------------	---------

What will you do with the **money** you are saving now by using cannabis less?

Build Connections

Keep in mind the people or groups who can support you as you change your cannabis use habits. Consider spending more time with people who care about your health and well-being.



What's Important to You?



1

For the next two weeks, keep track of how often you are using cannabis with the tracking tool on the next page.

2





Notice how using cannabis affects your mood and relationships.

3

Understand and deal with things that may be getting in the way of changing.

4

Accept support from your doctor, nurse, friend or someone else you trust.



Personal Tracker

Keep track of your cannabis use for the next two weeks.
On the days you use cannabis, add a check (✓).

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

WEEK 3			DATE:			

Main reasons for use:

.....

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

WEEK 4			DATE:			

Main reasons for use:

.....

Record What You Learn

As you work on assessing your cannabis use, keep track of the things you learn by recording them below.

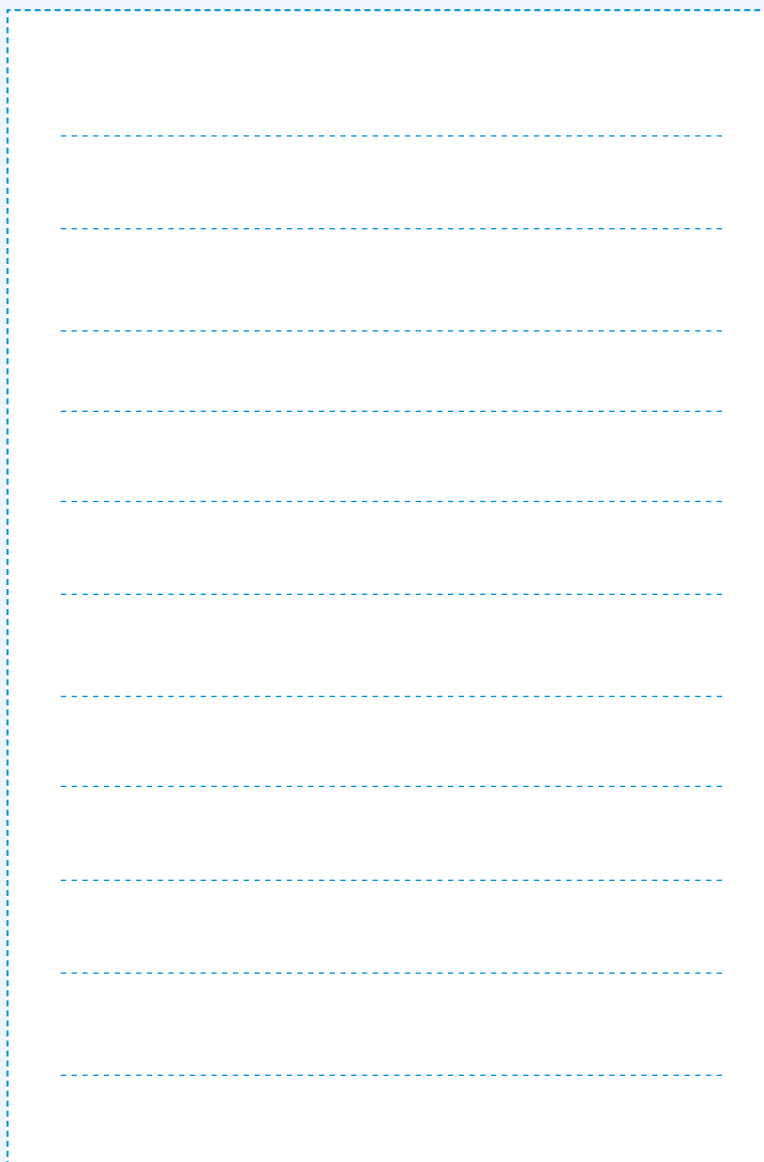
How has using cannabis affected your mood and sense of well-being?

How has using cannabis affected your relationships with other people?

What have you learned that might make it easier for you to use cannabis less or with lower risk in the future?

END OF PART TWO

Notes



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More Information

You've arrived at the end of the guide, but you can keep reaching for your goals. Build on the changes you've already succeeded in making.

Go back and answer the questions on page 6 again. This time the questions can just apply to the past month. You can do this every month to confirm your progress.

If you ever feel that your risk level is not getting as low as you'd like, consider going through the guide again or reaching out for support from your healthcare provider or counsellor.

Additional resources:

Wellness Together Canada

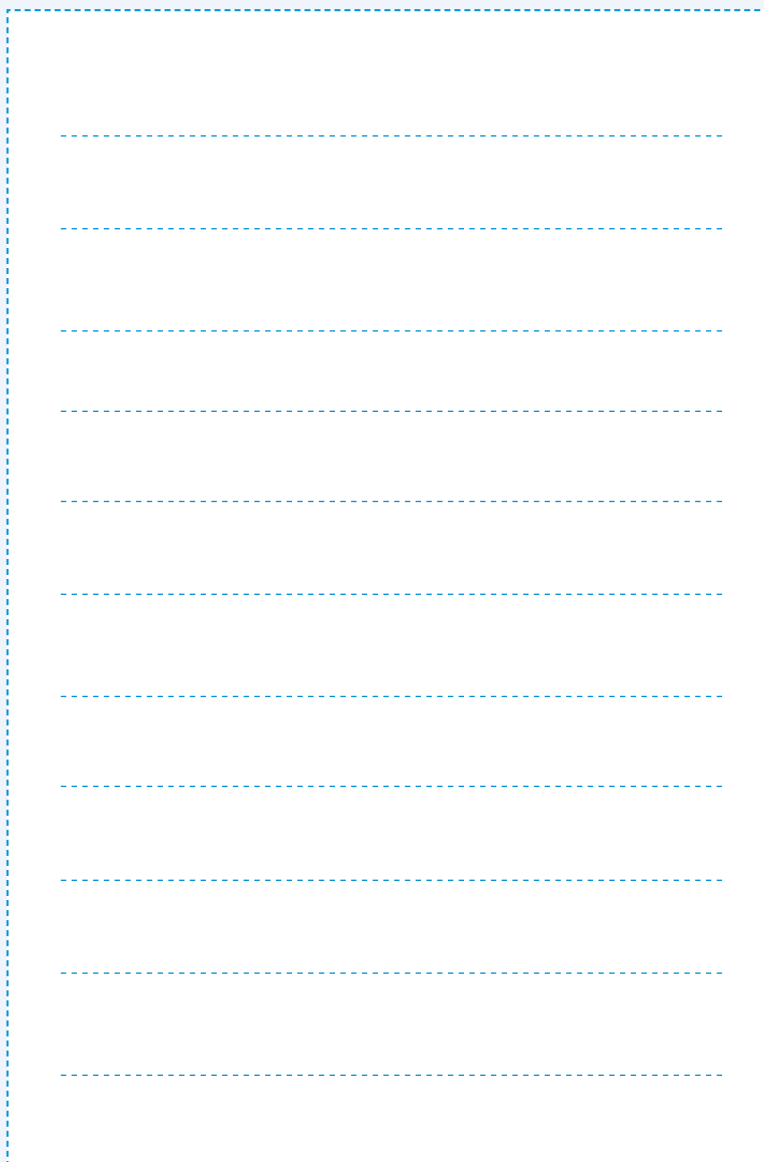
Finding Quality Addiction Care in Canada

Canada's Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines

ccsa.ca/cannabis

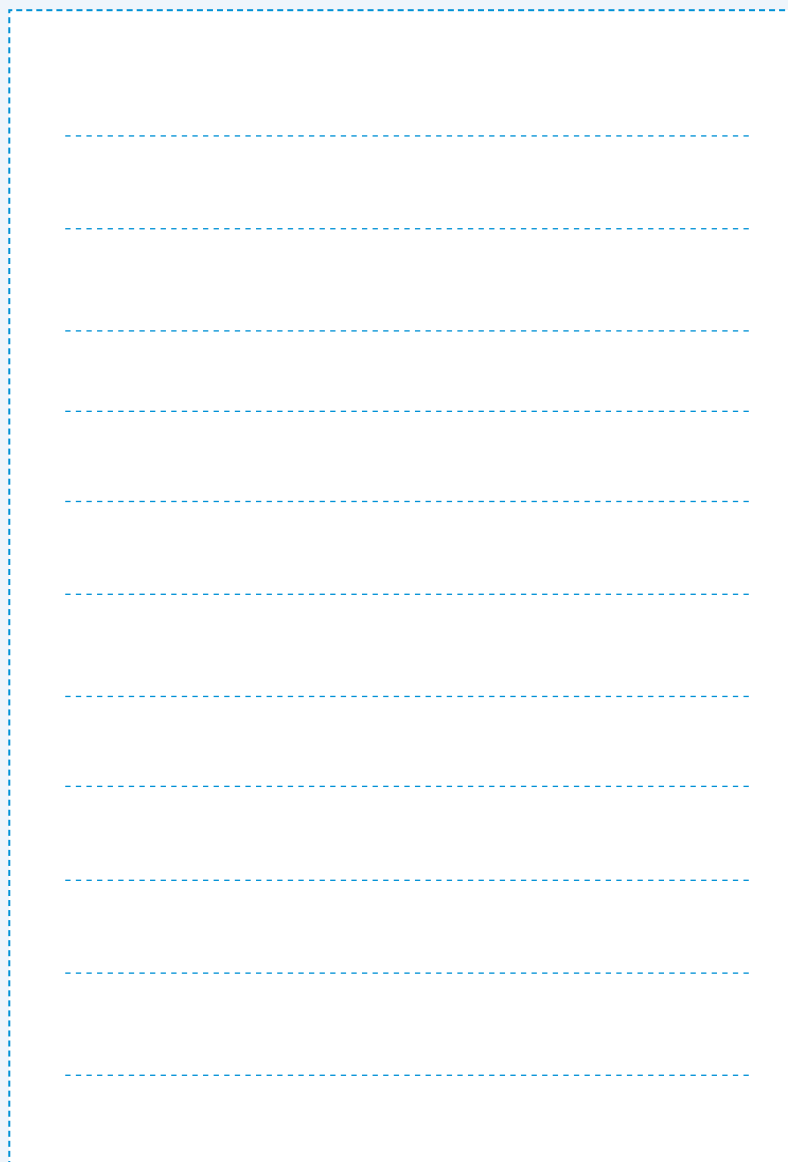
canada.ca/cannabis

Notes



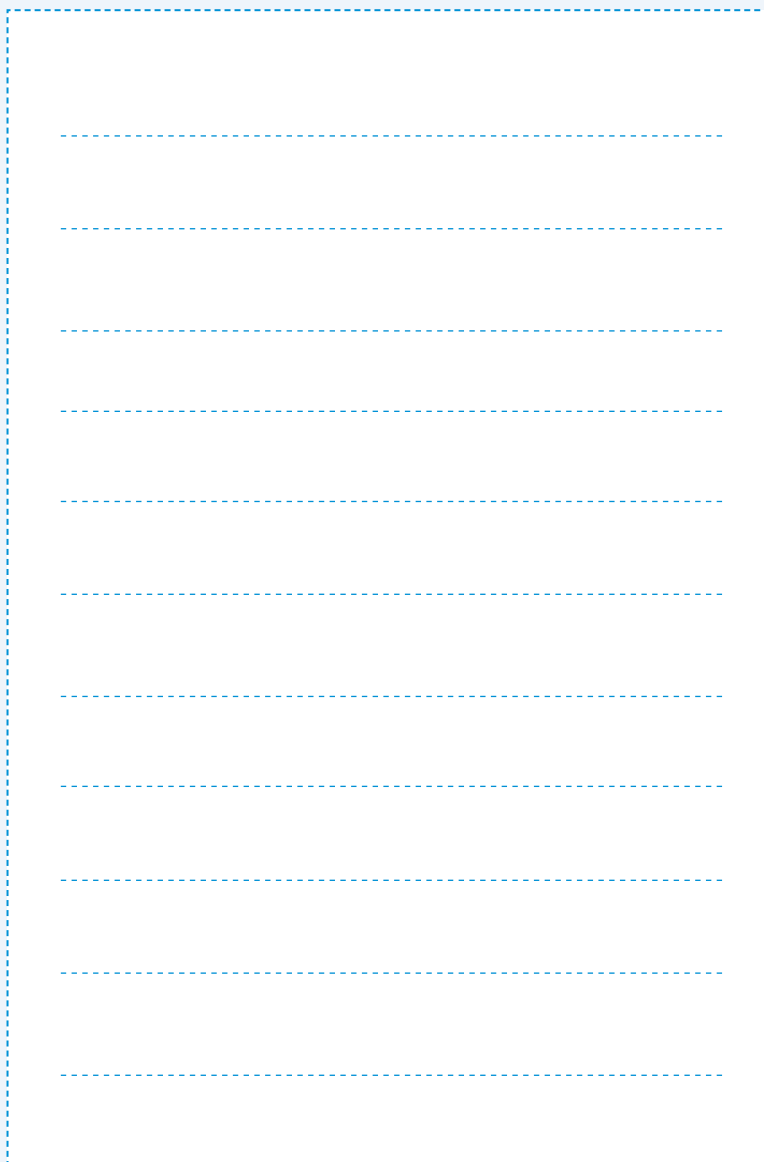
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Notes



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Notes



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