

# SELF-HELP STRATEGIES

For cutting down or  
stopping substance use

A guide



World Health  
Organization

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# 1 Introduction

If you think your substance use is putting you at risk of experiencing health, social, legal, psychological, work or family problems then this guide will help you to weigh up your substance use behavior and give you some ideas about how to change it.



If you experience severe withdrawal symptoms or serious discomfort when you stop using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, you should seek medical help from your doctor, health care worker or someone from a specialist drug and alcohol service.

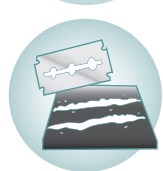
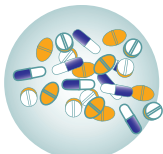
THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED FOR PEOPLE ABOVE 18 YEARS OF AGE WHO ARE AT MODERATE RISK OF SUBSTANCE RELATED PROBLEMS BUT DO NOT HAVE SEVERE SUBSTANCE RELATED PROBLEMS OR DEPENDENCE.

## 2 How do you know if you are at risk?

Different substances have different harms and risks.

For example you are at risk of experiencing problems:

- if you use tobacco products - especially by smoking;
- if you have a high consumption of alcoholic beverages or drink to intoxication;
- if you use substances such as cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine-type stimulants (including ecstasy and methamphetamine), inhalants, non prescribed sedatives or sleeping pills, hallucinogens, or opioids.



If you have a copy of this document it may be because your doctor or health care worker has asked you some questions about your substance use and thinks you might be at risk of harm from one or more substances.

THE RISK OF EXPERIENCING PROBLEMS CAN VARY FROM INDIVIDUAL TO INDIVIDUAL AND DEPEND ON YOUR ENVIRONMENT, HOW MUCH YOU USE, THE WAY YOU USE, YOUR AGE AND GENDER ETC.

Your doctor or health care worker may have given you a feedback card and information leaflets which contain information about specific health problems related to the substance(s) you use.

IT IS POSSIBLE  
TO CHANGE  
SUBSTANCE  
USE  
BEHAVIOUR,  
MANY  
PEOPLE HAVE  
DONE IT.

## 3 What is a substance use problem?

Substance use problems can arise as a result of acute intoxication, regular use or dependence - and from the way in which substances are used.

It is possible for a person to have problems from all of these.

Using substances by injection can cause serious health problems no matter which substance is injected. Injecting any drug is a significant risk factor for contracting bloodborne diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B and C. People who inject drugs have a higher risk of dependence and are likely to have more severe dependence than those who do not inject.

## 4 Getting started

You might already have decided that your substance use is causing problems for you.

Or, you may want to check whether you really are using too much. Either way the rest of this booklet will help you look at where you are now, and how you could make changes.

Changing our behaviours, including substance use, can seem scary or difficult but It is possible.

# 5 Getting support

You can use this guide by yourself without involving anyone else in what you are doing. However, it can be an enormous help to have your own supporter - someone who understands what you want to do and is willing to spend time helping.

A supporter needs to be someone you trust and feel comfortable with, such as your partner, a friend, a relative, someone at work, a nurse, a religious person, a counselor or a doctor. It is important that your supporter does not have a problem with substance use at the same time as trying to help you with your substance use.

If you ask someone to support you and, after thinking it over, that person says no, it is worth asking someone else. Many people appreciate being asked to help - it has rewards for them too.

Give your supporter this guide to read before you start, especially the Appendix "Advice for supporters".



As the saying goes, *A thousand mile journey starts with a single step.*

It doesn't really matter if you take breaks along the way: you'll still get there.

What counts is deciding you want to make changes, and then making them,

ONE SMALL  
STEP AT  
A TIME.



# 6 Do I need to do something about my substance use?

## EXAMPLE

John is a 33 year old man who lives with his partner and their young child. He went to the doctor because he continually feels tired and had recently caught a very bad cold. After a general examination the doctor asked John some questions about his alcohol and other drug use.

John smokes 1 or 2 pipes of cannabis most evenings and 4 or 5 pipes on the weekend, and has recently noticed some problems at home and work which have been made worse because of smoking cannabis.

The doctor said that John was at risk of experiencing health and other problems from smoking cannabis and asked him to think about what those problems were.

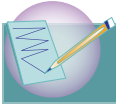
You'll get an answer to this question by writing down any problems you think your substance use has caused over the last 3 months.

Think about what substance(s) you use and the problems you think it might be causing. You might find that one substance causes several problems, such as arguments with your family or partner, problems with your health – like not sleeping properly, feeling depressed, or feeling anxious or agitated. Some people find that using substances can affect their memory and concentration, which can cause problems with work or study.

**EXAMPLE | John's list of problems due to his drug use.**

Substance	Problem
1 Cannabis	Forgetting things
2 Cannabis	Finding it hard to concentrate
3 Cannabis	My partner gets angry with me because I don't help around the house much
4 Cannabis	Not interested in doing much except watching TV
5 Cannabis	
6 Cannabis	

## Do you think your substance use might have caused any problems for you over the last 3 months?



Write down any problems relating to your substance use here

Substance	Problem
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

You can experience problems from using substances if you get **intoxicated**, or if you use **regularly**, or if you **inject** drugs. If you inject drugs or use on a regular basis you can become dependent.

If someone else (family member, health professional, etc) has said anything about problems due to your substance use, these might need to be added to your 'Problem' list.

Whether or not you came up with any problems...

## THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

YOU CAN CONTINUE ON AS YOU ARE OR YOU CAN CUT DOWN OR STOP YOUR SUBSTANCE USE.

# 7 What is your substance use balance sheet?



OF COURSE, WHATEVER YOU DO WILL HAVE POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES (BENEFITS), AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES (COSTS).

Here is a substance use balance sheet to help you weigh up the effects of continuing as you are, cutting down or stopping your substance use. If you regularly use more than one substance you may like to fill in a balance sheet for each substance separately.

**Think about both long term and short term positives and negatives.**

**EXAMPLE | Balance sheet 1. John's balance sheet looked like this.**

	Continuing my present substance use pattern	Reducing or stopping my substance use
<b>+</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Helps me relax after work</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I unwind and forget the day</li> </ul> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Enjoy myself more at parties and with my friends</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I wouldn't be so tired</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I would remember things better</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My relationship with my partner would be happier and she wouldn't get angry with me</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I would concentrate better at work</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I wouldn't miss work so much</li> </ul>
<b>-</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Affects my memory</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Affects my concentration</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I feel hazy and tired after a big night</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I sometimes miss work after a big night</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My partner isn't happy about it and we argue about it</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I spend a lot of time on contacting the supplier for obtaining the drugs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> It would be hard to relax after work</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I wouldn't enjoy myself so much at parties</li> </ul> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">My friends might laugh at me</p>



## Balance sheet 1

	Continuing my present substance use pattern	Reducing or stopping my substance use
<b>+</b>		
<b>-</b>		

Once completed, please review it again and mark the positives and negatives that are most important to you (X).

# 8 Are you concerned about your substance use?

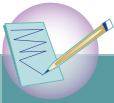
**EXAMPLE** | When John was asked: "How concerned are you about your substance use? On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all concerned and 10 is extremely concerned.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all concerned

Extremely concerned

John rated himself as a 6 because he was worried about his tiredness and forgetfulness and he wanted to improve his relationship with his partner. At the same time, he still felt that he really enjoyed smoking and would be sad to give it up.



Where do you rate yourself on this scale?



0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all concerned

Extremely concerned

**EXAMPLE | Substances**

John decided he was most concerned about his cannabis use. He wasn't concerned about any other substances because he wasn't using them regularly or excessively.



**Rank the substances that concern you in the order from most concern to least concern**

1

2

3

4

5

6

# 9 Measuring your substance use

You can work out how much you are using now by making a “substance use diary” of your substance use over the last week.

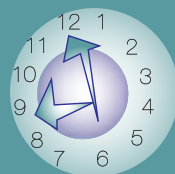
Go back over the week a day at a time and write down the information for each day (the time and place, who you were with, what you were using, how much you had, how much you spent) (See also the example below). At the end you will be able to see how much you used in the last week.

**EXAMPLE | Substance use diary. This is how John’s diary looked the week before he went to the doctor.**

When? Where? Who with?	What?	How much?	Money spent
Saturday night Peter’s party	Cannabis	6 pipes	\$15 (bag)
Sunday did gardening and played soccer in the park	Nothing	NA	NA
Monday night tired after work relaxed in front of TV at home	Cannabis	2 pipes	None-had some left
Tuesday went to guitar lesson after work, came home late	Nothing	NA	NA
Wednesday night watched soccer on TV at home	Cannabis	4 pipes	\$10 (bag)
Thursday night at home, watched TV	Cannabis	4 pipes	None-had some left
Friday night David and Peter came over and we watched a video	Cannabis	5 pipes	\$15 (bag)
When John looked over the week he was surprised to see he had smoked 21 cannabis pipes in total and spent \$40			

START WITH YESTERDAY AND GO BACK OVER THE WEEK. WRITE DOWN:

THE TIME AND PLACE OF YOUR SUBSTANCE USE.



WHO YOU WERE WITH

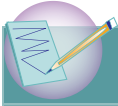


WHAT YOU WERE USING

HOW MUCH YOU HAD

HOW MUCH YOU SPENT





Fill in this "substance use diary" for your substance use over the last week

When? Where? Who with?	What?	How much?	Money spent

# 10 How much is too much?

If you drink alcohol, you are at risk of a range of health and other problems, especially if:

- you drink more than 2 standard drinks\* a day;
- you do not have at least 2 days of the week when you do not drink.

There is no risk-free level of alcohol consumption, and for many people consumption of 2 standard drinks a day can still be associated with significant risks.

## There are certain factors which may increase your risk, such as:

- a family history of alcohol dependence;
- being on certain medications or have certain medical conditions;
- you weigh less than other people for your gender and height;
- you have not eaten anything recently.

## You should not drink at all if you are:

- pregnant or breast feeding;
- driving, operating machinery or undertaking other activities that involve risk;
- you have health problems which may be made worse by alcohol;
- you are taking medicine which directly interacts with alcohol;
- you cannot control your drinking.

Ask your health care worker if you are unsure about any of these.

## A \*standard drink is:

- 1 can of ordinary beer (330ml at 4%);
- a single shot of spirits ( 30 ml at 40%);
- a glass of wine or small glass of sherry (100 ml at 12% or 70ml at 18%);
- a small glass of liqueur or aperitif (50ml at 25%).

THERE IS NO SAFE LEVEL OF CONSUMPTION FOR ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND TOBACCO PRODUCTS.

Smoking is the most harmful method of using tobacco.

Smokeless varieties such as chewing tobacco, snuff (which is inhaled) and snus (which is placed between gum and lip and absorbed) are also risky.





# 11 Making a decision

ON BALANCE  
ARE THERE  
ANY REASONS  
FOR YOU TO  
CHANGE?

Now, look back over your balance sheet, your substance use diary and your problems relating to substance use.

## Are there any reasons for you to change?

**EXAMPLE** | John decided that there were reasons to change so he marked the box.

Yes - Go to Chapter 12

No - You may not want to continue with this booklet now

Not sure - Write down the reasons why in the table below and consider talking it over with your supporter.



### Mark your decision below

Yes - Go to Chapter 12

No - You may not want to continue with this booklet now

Not sure - Write down the reasons why in the table below and consider talking it over with your supporter.



### Reasons to change my substance use

1

2

3

4

5

6

# 12 Choosing your goal

Now that you've decided to make a change to your substance use, your next decision is whether you'll use less, or stop using altogether.

**To help you make up your mind, do the following three tasks:**

## 1 Think about these questions

- Do you have any health or psychological problems that might be made worse by your substance use? Your doctor or other health professional can advise you.
- Do you experience withdrawal symptoms when you stop using? If so, stopping use entirely is probably the best goal for you. Your doctor or other health professional can help you manage the withdrawal symptoms. Please also see Chapter 17 on *Setting targets: How to stop*.
- Do you have any legal, financial or work related problems as a result of your substance use?
- Do you have any relationship or family problems because of your substance use?
- Have you solved substance use problems before by stopping completely? Then this might be your best way now.



## WILL I CUT DOWN – OR WILL I STOP MY SUBSTANCE USE?

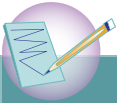
Remember what you decide now might not be the decision you follow for the rest of your life. You can review your substance use goal regularly. Whatever goal you choose it's a good idea to talk it over with the person you are closest to.

**2 Write down in the following balance sheet where you can write down the positives and the negatives of cutting down or cutting out.**

**EXAMPLE | Balance sheet 2. John completed the balance sheet and decided to cut down his cannabis use.**

	Cutting down	Stopping Completely
<b>+</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I could still use cannabis with my friends sometimes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I would still have fun at parties <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Using less means I wouldn't be so tired and forgetful <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If I only use at weekends I wouldn't miss work <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My partner would be pleased and we would argue less	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I wouldn't be tired and forgetful <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I wouldn't miss work <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My partner would be happy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I would save money by not buying the drug
<b>-</b>	I won't be able to relax with a few pipes after work every day	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I would really miss the fun times with my friends <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I would really miss relaxing with a few pipes after work. My friends would laugh at me <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I wouldn't enjoy myself so much at parties

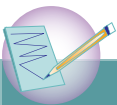
Once completed, mark the positives and negatives that are most important to you (X).



**Balance sheet 2**

	Cutting down	Stopping completely
<b>+</b>		
<b>-</b>		

**3 Choosing your goal. Looking over what you have written, which do you feel is the best goal for you?**



**Mark your answer below**

<input type="checkbox"/> To <b>cut down</b> your substance use - Go to Chapter 18 <input type="checkbox"/> To <b>stop</b> substance use completely - Go to Chapter 17	}	but before read the Chapters 13 through to 16
--	---	---

# 13 Changing the way you use

If you have decided to cut down, you might want to think about the way you use the substance, and consider less harmful alternatives.

For example, you may want to consider stopping injecting, or changing from injecting to another, less risky way of using substances.

If you inject drugs you increase the risk of harm from the drug, as well as harms that result from injecting.

Injecting amphetamines or cocaine increases the risk of psychosis and dependence.

Injecting heroin and other depressant drugs increases the risk of dependence and overdose.



It is also better not to inject because of the risk of blood-borne viruses (Hepatitis B and C, HIV/AIDS) and other infections. If you still inject, you may want to consider making some changes to reduce the risks from injecting. Like, for example, using clean equipment (e.g. needles and syringes, spoons, filters etc).

It is always risky to use drugs, but there are ways to reduce your risks if you choose to keep using.

## REDUCE THE RISKS:

- | DON'T DRIVE OR UNDERTAKE DANGEROUS ACTIVITIES WHILE USING DRUGS.
- | IF USING DRUGS, USE SMALLER AMOUNTS AND USE LESS OFTEN TO AVOID BECOMING DEPENDENT.
- | DON'T USE DAILY.
- | DON'T USE DRUGS WHEN NO HELP IS AVAILABLE IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG.
- | DON'T USE MULTIPLE SUBSTANCES ON ANY USING DAY.
- | DON'T USE DRUGS WHILE YOU ARE PREGNANT OR BREAST FEEDING AS IT CAN AFFECT YOUR BABY.

# 14 My contract with myself

Goal setting techniques will help you achieve your goals.

GOALS SHOULD BE **SMART**:

SPECIFIC  
MEASURABLE  
ATTAINABLE  
REALISTIC  
TIME BOUND

16

Now that you have made some decisions about your substance use and what you want to do about it you can write yourself a contract (see also examples below). This will help to remind you exactly what you have decided to do.

## EXAMPLE | My contract with myself

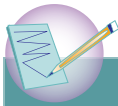
### EXAMPLE A

I will stop using (substance) on ..../..../....

### EXAMPLE B

I will cut down my (substance) use to no more than once per fortnight starting from ..../..../....

I will do this for three months until ..../..../.... when I will review my progress.



## My contract with myself

I will...

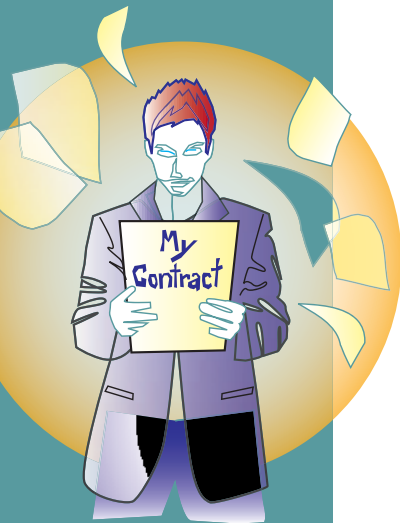
I will...

I will...

I will...

I will...

I will...



# 15 Moving ahead

To be able to make the changes you have decided to make, you can keep track of your substance use by keeping a weekly substance use diary (similar to the one you used in chapter 9).

## Use the weekly diaries that are included at the end of this guide and follow these instructions:

- Keep your diary every day.
- Write it up when **you did** use or when **you felt** like using (there is an extra column in the diary called 'wanted to use but didn't' for you to record this).
- Keep it for 3 months. This will help you to see changes. Later, you can record "spot checks" for a week or two every few months.
- Add up the money you've spent on substance use.
- If you like, review your diary with your supporter.
- Put a cross against 'high risk times' - when you had more than you meant to, or had a strong urge to use.
- Read what you have written and think about it several times a week.

Your diary shows you just what is happening, and when and where change is occurring.

The diary also makes it easier for you to spot your "high risk" situations – times when you use substances, or use too much, or badly want to use.

The situations that make you feel like using might be when you are with certain people, or in a certain place. It might also be how you are feeling - angry or upset, or may be happy and relaxed.

KEEPING A  
'SUBSTANCE USE  
DIARY'.

Information in your diary is private, ensure keeping it in a safe place.

THIS IS AN  
IMPORTANT  
PART OF  
HELPING  
YOU MAKE  
CHANGE.

# 16 High risk situations

## WHAT ARE YOUR HIGH RISK SITUATIONS?

What situations, circumstances, places or feelings make you want to use substances?

Are there particular situations when you use drugs or use more than you intend to, or use when you don't mean to?

If you can identify your high risk situations - where you used drugs or used more than you meant to or badly wanted to use - it will help you in setting guidelines for yourself:

- In particular places where it is easily available e.g. home, a friend's place, a club, etc?
- Around certain people e.g. partner, particular friends, etc?
- At particular times e.g. after dinner, weekends, celebrations etc?
- Your high risk situations may also be tied to certain emotions such as when you feel depressed, angry, guilty, stressed or worried.
- Think of the last few times your substance use got you into trouble... and when it didn't. What's the difference between these occasions?

To identify them it can help you to have a look at the '*substance use diary*' on page 10 and then list them in the following table (see also an example below).

**EXAMPLE** | John identified his high risk situations and found he was most likely to smoke cannabis...

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | To help me relax when I get home from work |
| 2 | When I am watching TV                      |
| 3 | When I am with my friends on the weekends  |
| 4 | At parties with friends                    |
| 5 |  |
| 6 |  |



List your 'high risk situations' here

- |   |
|---|
| 1 |
| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |
| 5 |
| 6 |

# 17 Setting targets: how to stop

## If your goal is to stop substance use completely:

- Don't postpone. Decide a target date to stop using the drug. Stop on that date.
- Declare publicly your intention to stop. This will help to mobilize others and you towards maintaining abstinence.
- Stay away as much as possible from the cues and triggers which remind you of drug use.

You may face withdrawal effects after stopping use. Seek support from your health care provider if the withdrawal effects are serious.

## How to avoid relapsing

Relapsing means returning to drug use after you have stopped for a while. It is important to identify the situations that could trigger relapse for you. This will help you to stop it from happening.

Common triggers for relapse include:

- When you are experiencing emotions such as frustration, anger, fear, anxiety, tension, depression, loneliness, sadness, boredom, jealousy, worry, grief or loss.
- When you are coping with the physical symptoms of drug use such as craving or withdrawal.
- If you try to test your will power or ability to control yourself.
- When you are coping with problems arising from arguments and disagreements.
- Pressure from others to use drugs.

Please also see *How to cope with cravings* and *How to say no* in this guide where you can learn more about relapse prevention.

NO SUBSTANCE  
USE IN ANY  
SITUATION.



RETURNING TO  
DRUG USE AFTER  
YOU HAVE STOPPED  
FOR A WHILE IS  
COMMON. IT'S  
NORMAL TO FEEL  
DISAPPOINTED, BUT  
THE TRICK IS NOT TO  
LET IT CONTINUE.



# 18 Setting substance use targets: how to cut down

## SETTING SUBSTANCE USE TARGETS.

**If your goal is to cut down you will need some targets like these**

- ▮ How many substance free days per week or month?
- ▮ How often will I use?
- ▮ How many times will I use on using days?
- ▮ What is the maximum amount I will use at any one time?
- ▮ How much will I use in a week or month?
- ▮ What are my high risk situations where I'll avoid using?
- ▮ How will I administer the substance?
- ▮ How will I reduce the risk of harm?

**EXAMPLE** | John decided the following strategy would work best for him...

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | I will avoid smoking cannabis after work on weekdays (Monday to Friday)  |
| 2 | I will only smoke cannabis on one night of the weekend                   |
| 3 | I will not smoke any more than two pipes of cannabis in any one day      |
| 4 | I will avoid buying large amounts of cannabis because it is too tempting |
| 5 |  |
| 6 |  |



**My "substance use guidelines" are...**

- |   |
|---|
| 1 |
| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |
| 5 |
| 6 |

# 19 How to cope with cravings

Cravings occur when the chemistry and function of your brain changes because of regular drug use.

Try to identify your triggers for cravings. It can help to use a craving diary.

Summarize your cravings under the headings of 'behaviors', 'physical feelings' and 'thoughts'.

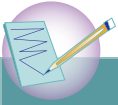
EXAMPLE   John's craving diary			
Place and time	Thoughts	Physical feelings	Behaviors
<b>23rd June Evening</b> <b>Friend's place</b>	"I feel I need it now" "I can't get it out of my head" "It calls me"		
<b>23rd June Evening</b> <b>My House</b> <b>Old Street</b>		"I suffered from cravings, I felt pain in my stomach" "I started smelling it"	
<b>23rd June Evening</b> <b>Old Street</b>			"I went down a street where I used to use drugs with my friends and I immediately had strong cravings"

Cravings are common and normal: they are not a sign of failure.

Abstinence is the best way to ensure complete removal of cravings.

HOW TO COPE WITH CRAVINGS:

- | DELAY
- | DISTRACT
- | DECIDE
- | POSITIVE SELF-TALK
- | RELAXATION & IMAGERY



### Craving diary

Place and time	Thoughts	Physical feelings	Behaviors

### You can use the following techniques to deal with your triggers for cravings:

**Delay** – Delay your use of drugs for 30 minutes. The cravings should lessen, or pass, as may your desire to use.

**Distract** – Do not sit in one place thinking about drugs while you are having cravings. Get busy! Distract yourself with another activity. This could include chores or a hobby.

**Decide** – Make a list of positives and negatives about your drug use to remind you of why you have chosen the goal of abstinence.

**Positive self talk** – Talk to yourself out loud about how cravings are destructive feelings that WILL pass with time. Talk yourself through the consequences and the problems you will have if you start taking drugs again.

**Relaxation and imagery** – Relaxation exercises using positive and relaxing images can be used to take your mind off an urge to use drugs.

# 20 Helpful tips

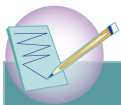
After a break from drug use people often find that changing their daily activities can help them to resist returning to drug use.

## These tips will help you no matter what your goal is:

- Make sure you have a healthy diet and get plenty of sleep.
- Establish a regular exercise routine – walking, yoga, the gym.
- Drink plenty of water and other non-alcoholic drinks.
- Keep busy with non substance use activities.
- Take up new hobbies or spend more time on old ones.
- Keep yourself active and busy.
- Make non using friends.
- Put the money you save into a special fund to save up for something you really need or want.
- Find paid employment, or do volunteer work.

## These tips will help if your goal is to cut down:

- Never buy more than the amount you plan to use in one session.
- Avoid having a stash that might tempt you to use more.
- Start using later than usual and finish earlier and keep this tendency progressing.
- Declare regular non use days – at least..... days per week.



List any other “helpful tips” you can think of

1

2

3

4

5

6

THESE TIPS  
WILL HELP  
YOU STICK  
TO YOUR  
SUBSTANCE  
USE TARGETS,  
NO MATTER  
WHAT YOUR  
GOAL IS.

# 21 Handling high risk situations

YOU WILL FEEL MORE IN CONTROL IF YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR A DIFFICULT SITUATION.

IF NOTHING SEEMS TO HAVE WORKED, SEEK HELP - FROM YOUR SUPPORTER, FRIEND, PARTNER, THE PERSON WHO GAVE YOU THIS BOOKLET OR A PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLOR.

Earlier on we looked at how to identify high risk situations - the times, places, occasions, people, thoughts and emotions which might trigger your substance use or your urge to use.

Identifying your high risk times is step one. Step two is learning how to handle them. Rather than wait until you are under pressure, work out beforehand some ways of coping with these situations.

You could decide not to use or delay using. Alternatively you could distract yourself by getting involved in doing something else. You could also make a list of all the benefits you have gained by not using, as well as all the things you will lose if you do use. This can help you decide what to do.

A method that many people find works well in preparing for high risk situations is the **problem solving approach**. Complete the table on page 25 (see also the example).

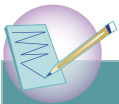
This is really good for solving other sorts of problems as well.

- 1 Identify the problem.
- 2 Brainstorm ideas for handling it - don't be too fussy. Write down even those that may seem crazy or impractical.
- 3 Think what is likely to happen if you try each one and then select those you feel will be most effective.
- 4 Try one out. If your first choice doesn't work, try the next one. Keep on trying until you find one that works. If what you tried doesn't work, repeat 3 and 4 until you find something that does.



**EXAMPLE | John identified his high risk situations and used the problem solving approach to decide what to do in those situations**

<b>High risk situation A</b>	I use cannabis in the evening to relax when I get home from work in front of the TV
<b>Brainstormed solutions</b>	<p>I'll sit down and put my feet up when I get home</p> <p>I'll practice my guitar</p> <p>I'll kick the soccer ball around in the park</p> <p>I'll talk to my partner about how the day went</p> <p>I'll go to a friend's place on the way home</p> <p>I'll use some cannabis to relax myself</p>
<b>Best solutions</b>	Practice my guitar and talk to my partner
<b>What happened</b>	I played my guitar and I talked to my partner while we had dinner and felt better
<b>High risk situation B</b>	I smoke cannabis with my friends on the weekend and at parties
<b>Brainstormed solutions</b>	<p>I won't go to any more parties or see my friends</p> <p>I'll try and do more active things with David and Peter and not just stay at home</p> <p>I'll go to parties with friends who don't use cannabis</p> <p>I'll bring just enough cannabis to parties to have 2 pipes</p> <p>I'll tell David and Peter that I'm thinking of cutting back for a while</p> <p>I'll take all the cannabis I'm offered</p>
<b>Best solution</b>	<p>Be more active with David and Peter and tell them</p> <p>I'm cutting back</p>
<b>What happened</b>	<p>Told David and Peter that I wanted to cut down and get fit</p> <p>We spent time at the party talking about putting a soccer team together</p>



**High risk situations**

<b>High risk situation A</b>	
<b>Brainstormed solutions</b>	
<b>Best solutions</b>	
<b>What happened</b>	
<b>High risk situation B</b>	
<b>Brainstormed solutions</b>	
<b>Best solution</b>	
<b>What happened</b>	

# 22 How to say 'no'

## PREPARE YOURSELF TO SAY 'NO'



26

## CREATE YOUR OWN REFUSAL STYLE.

One good way to control your substance use is to say 'no' when someone offers you substances.

If you have always said 'yes' in the past it can be hard to say that first 'no' but once you've said it once it becomes easier to refuse the next time. You'll feel good about yourself too.

A simple 'no thanks, not tonight' can be effective. Or you can say:

- ▮ 'No thanks, I'm cutting down.'
- ▮ 'No thanks, I'm having a rest for a while.'
- ▮ 'Sorry, doctor's orders, but you have some if you want to.'

You might find that people accept you saying 'no' without a problem. If it is a problem for people, and you feel uncomfortable about being asked you might have to leave the situation and recognise that **this is a high risk situation and perhaps you need to avoid it.**

Plan and practice your refusal to deal with high risk situations.

### Create your own refusal style by using body language as well as what you say

Tips for using body language	Tips for what to say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▮ Look directly at the person when you answer - it increases the effectiveness of the message.</li><li>▮ Stand or sit up straight - it shows you are confident in your choice.</li><li>▮ Don't feel guilty about refusing - it won't hurt anyone if you choose not to use.</li><li>▮ Leave the room if the other person keeps insisting or pushing.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▮ Use a clear, firm, confident voice.</li><li>▮ 'No' should be the first word out of your mouth.</li><li>▮ Suggest an alternative activity if you want to do something else with that person.</li><li>▮ Tell the person offering you drugs not to ask you now or in the future to stop them from asking you again.</li><li>▮ Change the subject to something else.</li><li>▮ Avoid using excuses and vague answers as these imply you might change your mind later.</li></ul>

# 23 Sticking to your targets

## This tips will help you

- Keep going over your reasons for wanting to stop or cut down on your substance use. Check your balance sheet to remind yourself why you wanted to make changes.
- Regularly check your substance use diary. See how much you are using now compared with before.
- Read and re-read your targets, especially on substance use days.
- Distraction: keep yourself occupied – e.g., exercise, housework, movies, gaming, yoga, tai chi, enrol in a course, gardening, etc.
- Every time you resist an old habit you come a step closer to overcoming it. If you feel you've got to use, get busy with something else, quickly. The feeling will pass.
- Aim to talk to your supporter every week. Tell them how you are going. Talk about the good things as well as the bad.
- Don't give up just because you've had a bad day. Be kind to yourself. Think "I'll do it differently next time". Remember the problem solving approach.
- Give yourself a pat on the back and reward yourself with something you enjoy. This could be shopping, going for a walk in your favourite spot, having a bath, listening to music, going out with friends, having a nice meal. Reward yourself often instead of saving up and bingeing on one big reward.
- Be kind to yourself even when you think you haven't done very well. Tell yourself that change doesn't happen overnight and be patient. The smallest step in the right direction takes you towards your goal.

So far, you've written out your substance use balance sheets, your goal and substance use targets. You've also looked at your high risk situations and ways to handle them.

NOW YOU  
NEED TO  
STICK WITH  
THEM.

27





## 24 When things go wrong...

If your substance use is getting out of control, get help. Speak to your supporter, your primary health care worker, a friend or a specialist alcohol and other drug service.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE.

It's not the end of the world if you stray from your targets.

The trick is not to let any extra substance use continue. Get back to those targets. Look at what happened. Was this a high risk situation that should be on your list? If so, perhaps you need to think of new ways to cope.

Look again at your balance sheet. Is this the best goal for you? Talk it over with your supporter or a health professional.

Above all, be honest with yourself.

## 25 Alternatives to substance use

For many people, substance use has become a part of their life. It is a habit they feel lost without. But, just as you made a habit in the first place, you can make a new one, step by step.

Every time you stop yourself from following an old substance use habit, you are laying a path to better and safer habits.

You can choose not to use. If so, make your choice easier by finding enjoyable alternatives and non using company.

Many people who use substances say they most want to use when they are trying to cope with uncomfortable feelings about themselves or their lives.

You need to find new ways of coping with your feelings, without substances.

Open up - share your feelings with your partner, a friend, your supporter or a counsellor. Look for activities you enjoy doing.

Be around people who inspire you.

Take courses, read books, watch movies and listen to music that can help you to a happier, healthier lifestyle.

THERE IS ALWAYS AN ALTERNATIVE TO SUBSTANCE USE.

# Appendix A

## Advice for supporters

Someone close to you - maybe a friend, spouse, or relative, has asked for your support to help them stick to their targets regarding substance use.

Read through the guide with them. Ask them how they would like you to help them handle risky situations and achieve their goal and targets.

They may want to contact you when they are having difficulties sticking to their plan. Let them know where and when they can talk to you.

They might find it helpful to go over their progress with you and discuss any problems. You will encourage them if you congratulate them on their successes. Avoid criticizing or blaming if they do slip up.

Arrange to reward the person you are supporting when they achieve their targets. This could be cooking them a meal, going to a film - anything that is special to them.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Remember that changing habits is not easy and there may be times when the person does not stick to their target.

They may need your support in helping them to get back to their targets regarding substance use.

Help them to see the slip up as a one-off lapse, NOT as a reason to give up on their targets completely.

# Appendix B

## Copies of the balances sheets, lists and charts that were used in the booklet

You can copy them if you wish.



Write down any problems relating to your substance use here  
(See page 5 of the booklet)

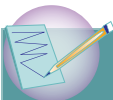
Substance	Problem
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

30



Balance sheet 1  
(See page 6 of the booklet)

	Continuing my present substance use pattern	Reducing or stopping my substance use
+		
-		



Where do you rate yourself on this scale?  
(See page 7 of the booklet)

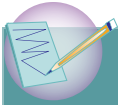


0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all concerned					Extremely concerned					



Rank the substances that concern you in the order from most concern  
to least concern  
(See page 8 of the booklet)

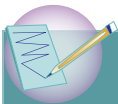
1
2
3
4
5
6



**Weekly substance use diary | Week 1**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't, If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



**Weekly substance use diary | Week 2**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

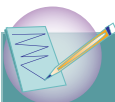
\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't, If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



### Weekly substance use diary | Week 3 (See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

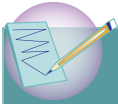
\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't. If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



### Weekly substance use diary | Week 4 (See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't. If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



**Weekly substance use diary | Week 5**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

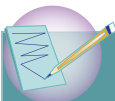
\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't. If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



**Weekly substance use diary | Week 6**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

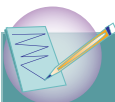
\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't. If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



**Weekly substance use diary | Week 7**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't. If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.

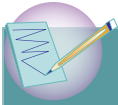


**Weekly substance use diary | Week 8**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't. If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.

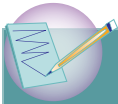




**Weekly substance use diary | Week 9**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

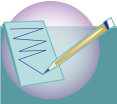
\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't, If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



**Weekly substance use diary | Week 10**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

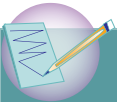
\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't, If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



**Weekly substance use diary | Week 11**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

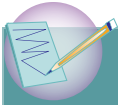
\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't. If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



**Weekly substance use diary | Week 12**  
(See page 10 of the booklet)

When? Where? Who with?	Substance(s) used and how much?	Money spent	Wanted to use but didn't*

\* If you are cutting down, fill in this column if you felt you wanted to use more than your limit but didn't. If you are stopping, make a note if you wanted to use but didn't. In either case, write down what you did instead.



**Reasons to change my substance use**  
(See page 12 of the booklet)

1

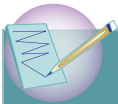
2

3

4

5

6



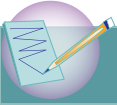
**Balance sheet 2**  
(See page 14 of the booklet)

Cutting down

Stopping completely

+

-



**My contract with myself**  
(See page 16 of the booklet)

I will...

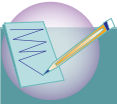
I will...

I will...

I will...

I will...

I will...



**List your "high risk situations" here**  
(See page 18 of the booklet)

1

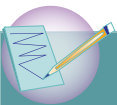
2

3

4

5

6



**My "substance use guidelines" are...**  
(See page 20 of the booklet)

1

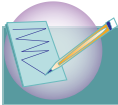
2

3

4

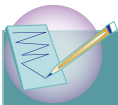
5

6



**Craving diary**  
(See page 22 of the booklet)

Place and time	Thoughts	Physical feelings	Behaviors



**List any other "helpful tips" you can think of**  
(See page 23 of the booklet)

1
2
3
4
5
6



## High risk situations (See page 25 of the booklet)

<b>High risk situation A</b>	
<b>Brainstormed solutions</b>	
<b>Best solutions</b>	
<b>What happened</b>	
<b>High risk situation B</b>	
<b>Brainstormed solutions</b>	
<b>Best solution</b>	
<b>What happened</b>	











EXIT THE MAZE OF  
HARMFUL SUBSTANCE USE  
FOR BETTER GLOBAL HEALTH

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20, Avenue Appia  
1211 Geneva 27  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 791 21 11  
Email: [msbGwho.int](mailto:msbGwho.int)  
[www.who.int/substance\\_abuse](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse)

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