



MARIJUANA ANONYMOUS PAMPHLET PACK (2025)

This **MA Pamphlet Pack** includes one hard paper copy of each Conference-approved pamphlet to copy locally. To make it easy to distinguish between pamphlets, A New Leaf Publications (ANLP) has organized MA's pamphlets into four categories, and suggests copying pamphlets in the colors below. These paper colors are *suggestive only*, meetings are welcome to copy on any color paper they want. ANLP's suggestion is to copy Newcomers pamphlets on blue paper, about Service pamphlets on Green, General pamphlets on Cream, and Stories pamphlets on Pink, or to otherwise print each category of pamphlet on a different color paper.

Suggested Pamphlet Categories and Paper Colors

Newcomer Pamphlets - Blue

- P-01 For the Newcomer
- P-02 About Sponsorship
- P-04 About Marijuana Detox
- P-05 Why Marijuana Anonymous
- P-08 Working the Program
- P-11 Dangers of Cross Addiction
- P-18 What about CBD?

General Pamphlets - Cream

- P-10 MA Pocket Reminder
- P-15 For the Loved Ones of Marijuana Addicts
- P-16 Beginning Meditation
- P-17 A Doctor's Opinion: About Marijuana Addiction

Service Pamphlets - Green

- P-07 Why H&I Panels
- P-12 MA's Service Structure
- P-13 The MA Meeting and The Home Group

Stories Pamphlets - Pink

- P-06 Sharing Our Experience, Strength, and Hope: Personal Stories of Marijuana Addicts
- P-14 Stories by Teens
- P-19 About Marijuana Detox—Member Stories
- P-20 Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS)—Member Stories

ANLP is the Publishing Department of Marijuana Anonymous (MA), responsible for publishing and distribution of all MA Conference-approved literature and service materials, including MA's Pamphlets. All MA Pamphlets can also be downloaded for free from the MA website at MA12.org/pamphlets. Copies of other service materials essential to a meeting, such as the Service Manual and New Meeting Starter Kit, can also either be downloaded from the MA website for free, or ordered as a spiral bound print copy from the ANLP website at ANLP12.org/store.

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ANLP Store: ANLP12.org/store **Questions about purchasing, copying or downloading?** Office@ANLP12.org

The Twelve Steps of Marijuana Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over marijuana, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God,
as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood God*, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to marijuana addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Questions of Marijuana Anonymous

The following questions may help you determine whether marijuana is a problem in your life.

1. Has using marijuana stopped being fun?
2. Do you ever get high alone?
3. Is it hard for you to imagine a life without marijuana?
4. Do you find that your friends are determined by your marijuana use?
5. Do you use marijuana to avoid dealing with your problems or to cope with your feelings?
6. Has your marijuana use led to financial difficulties and/or legal consequences?
7. Does your marijuana use let you live in a privately defined world?
8. Have you ever failed to keep promises you made about cutting down or controlling your use of marijuana?
9. Has your use of marijuana caused problems with your health, memory, concentration, or motivation?
10. When your stash is nearly empty, do you feel anxious or worried about how to get more?
11. Do you plan your life around your marijuana use?
12. Have friends or relatives ever complained that your using is damaging your relationship with them?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, you may have a problem with marijuana.

For the Newcomer



MARIJUANA ANONYMOUS

A Twelve Step Program of Recovery
for Marijuana Addicts

Marijuana Anonymous World Services

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Hollywood, California 90028-6814

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MA12.org or Marijuana-Anonymous.org
Support@MA12.org

Welcome to Marijuana Anonymous!

This pamphlet is for those new to Marijuana Anonymous and those who are just curious to know more about us. All types of people have found themselves using marijuana/cannabis to the point where it is no longer fun or helpful. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions.

What is Marijuana Anonymous?

Founded in 1989, Marijuana Anonymous (MA) is a 12-Step program similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. We are a group of people who have problems that relate directly or indirectly to marijuana, and we support each other in recovery. In MA, the terms marijuana and cannabis are often used interchangeably. Our goal is to have a comfortable environment where anyone can share openly.

Am I a marijuana addict?

No one can decide that for you; only you can make that decision. If you find yourself thinking about marijuana even when you are not using it or have struggled to stop, we encourage you to read the Twelve Questions in this pamphlet. Also, many of us have found that attending meetings helped us to decide.

How can MA membership help me?

Participating in the fellowship of MA can help you accomplish what you could not do alone. It provides an opportunity to connect with others who share similar experiences. MA has led many of us to a greater understanding of ourselves and the causes of addiction. We find hope as we see others recovering from our common problem.

What happens at an MA meeting?

Meetings vary in format (speaker meetings, topic, or literature-based). Most meetings begin with a series of readings that explain the program. There may be introductions and acknowledgements of sobriety. Then, people have the opportunity to

share about their difficulties with marijuana and what they are doing to recover. We find it helpful to verbalize with others what we are experiencing.

What is the program of recovery?

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are the foundation of our program of recovery from marijuana addiction. The Steps are a series of suggestions that guide us in our sobriety. To work this program, we attend meetings, connect with other members, and work the Steps with a sponsor. For more information on the Twelve Traditions, please read the *Introduction to Marijuana Anonymous* pamphlet.

What is a sponsor and how do I get one?

A sponsor is a fellow addict with a working knowledge of the Twelve Steps who guides you through recovery by sharing their experience, strength, and hope. Sponsors are usually found by attending meetings. We recommend reaching out to someone who inspires you and with whom you would like to work the program. While there are no set rules, as a guideline, we suggest avoiding anyone with whom there is a possibility of a romantic or physical relationship. For more information, please read the *About Sponsorship* pamphlet.

If I join MA will I need to stop drinking or using other drugs?

We cannot tell you how to recover. The only requirement for MA membership is a desire to stop using marijuana. We have found, however, that recovery requires us to examine our relationship with other drugs, including alcohol.

How much does MA membership cost?

Nothing. There are no dues or fees. MA is completely self-supporting. MA meetings pay their bills through the voluntary contributions of members. A basket is passed at in-person meetings. Donations to virtual meetings are made through PayPal, Venmo or other digital payment methods.

What commitments do I make by attending an MA meeting?

None. Our program is voluntary. The only thing you need to begin participating is a desire to stop using marijuana. In MA, everything is only a suggestion.

Is MA a religious organization and is there much talk about God?

While the term God is heard in many meetings, MA is not connected with any religious organization or denomination. It is a spiritual program that recognizes the need for a power greater than ourselves as a tool for recovery. There are members who call this power God or Higher Power. Others say it is the strength, wisdom, and connection found in meetings.

What happens if I see people I know in MA?

If you see people you know, they are there for the same reason you are and will respect your anonymity. Who we see and what we hear in meetings is not mentioned outside of the meetings. Membership in MA is confidential and anonymous whether in person or online.

Is there a cure for marijuana addiction?

Those of us in Marijuana Anonymous have found in our experience that there is no cure for marijuana addiction. We manage the addiction by working the program. MA's message is one of hope and promise that you can stop using marijuana and lose the obsession one day at a time.

Attend a meeting and see for yourself what Marijuana Anonymous is all about. We were all newcomers once.

over-committed as this may lead to service burnout and could cause resentments. Because sponsorship is a special relationship between two recovering people, there is often a limit to the number of people with which this type of relationship can be simultaneously maintained.

How can I stop sponsoring someone?

Once you have determined that ending the sponsor/sponsee relationship is the best course of action, simply have a conversation and explain why you no longer can sponsor that person. Sponsorship is meant to enhance your recovery. If continuing to work with the sponsee compromises your sobriety, serenity, and/or program, seek the counsel of your sponsor and/or other members before having a conversation with the sponsee.

What do I do if a sponsee doesn't want help?

It is futile to force unwanted advice and help onto another. Don't take it personally should they not apply your suggestions. Consider evaluating if this person is a good fit for you to continue sponsoring.

Some Suggested Sponsorship "Don'ts"

- Avoid being judgmental, instead place principles before personalities.
- Avoid imposing your personal views, instead remain open-minded.
- Refrain from taking another's inventory, instead allow them to arrive at their own conclusions.
- Don't make decisions for the newcomer, instead make suggestions.
- Don't pretend to know all the answers, instead remain humble, remembering we are all addicts in recovery doing the best with what we have.

Some Suggested Sponsorship "Do's"

- Present an example of how the program is working in your life by practicing the principles in all your affairs.
- Encourage sponsees to attend meetings and be of service.

- Introduce sponsees to others in the program to build a support network.
- Patiently guide sponsees through the Twelve Step literature.
- Treat each sponsee as an individual; we are each unique examples of the program.

Above all, remember that the pillars of the program are recovery, unity, and service. Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. We are being given a treasured opportunity to participate in our own recovery and in that of another.

A Word About Sponsorship:

To Be Read In Meetings

A Sponsor is a fellow addict with a working knowledge of the Twelve Steps, who lives by the principles, and has a solid program in their life.

Look for someone who inspires you to work the Steps and is working a program you admire. Experience has shown that having a Sponsor is of great value and importance in recovery.

We hope you make it a priority.

With their experience, strength, and hope, Sponsors compassionately guide and challenge you in recovery.

While there are no set rules, as a guideline, we suggest avoiding anyone with whom there is a possibility of a romantic or physical relationship. Sponsorship should be a safe relationship. Find someone you can trust and with whom you can be honest.

Do not be afraid to ask someone to Sponsor you. You could inquire if they would consider being your Temporary Sponsor. In time, you will know if the relationship is working and should become more permanent.

About Sponsorship



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What is Sponsorship?

Sponsorship is one recovering person talking to another. It is a two-way relationship based upon mutual respect and the principles of the program. While sharing experience, strength, and hope, both members enrich their lives and deepen their understanding of the basic principles of the program. The sponsor and the sponsee meet as equals to work the Steps and if possible attend meetings together.

The communication and mutual sharing helps both the sponsor and the sponsee. For the newcomer, a sponsor is someone with whom they can talk through problems, ask questions, and discover a life with hope in recovery. For the sponsor, helping others allows a sponsor to give back what was freely given to them and continues the acts of service that are vital to our recovery.

Getting a Sponsor:

Is a sponsor required?

It is not required; however, working the Steps with a sponsor is an essential tool of recovery. A relationship with a sponsor often helps the sponsee develop an ability to trust others and communicate effectively. Having frequent, close contact with another member of the program provides an opportunity to discuss issues in private that one might not be willing to raise in front of the group.

When is the right time to begin working with a sponsor?

Everyone's recovery process is their own, and there is no specific timeline to follow; no particular length of sobriety is required. It is important to get beyond any fear of asking other people for help. Stepping out of your comfort zone to work with someone else is an important part of recovery. We are not burdening sponsors by sharing our challenges. In fact, it is an honor to be asked to be someone's sponsor. To get started, you can ask a person to be a temporary sponsor, or interim sponsor, and see how the relationship develops.

How will I know if someone is a good fit to be my sponsor?

There are no specific rules for choosing a sponsor. It is worth considering someone who inspires you and with whom you would like to work the program. In order to find a sponsor, widen your exposure to recovering people by attending as many meetings as possible. A sponsor can be found at in-person, virtual, or phone meetings. Many sponsor/sponsee relationships exist and thrive without ever having met in person. *Marijuana Anonymous does not provide sponsors, but we can offer guidance in finding one.*

Should a sponsor be of the same gender?

The gender of a sponsor you select to guide you through the Steps is at your discretion. We suggest avoiding sponsorship relationships that may lead to problematic attachments, including romantic or physical relationships, which could detract from your recovery.

How often should I contact my sponsor?

It is up to you and your sponsor to determine how often you communicate. Many sponsors ask newcomers to contact them regularly for the first month or two. If your sponsor is away or can't be reached, it is suggested you call other members of the program. Having more than one person that you can reach out to regularly is advisable.

Must I do anything a sponsor asks, or agree with whatever they says?

Ultimately your recovery is your responsibility; it is up to you how you apply their suggestions. This peer-support relationship is one of trust and shared experiences. If clarification is needed or disagreements emerge, then discuss them with your sponsor. If you continue to feel the suggestions they make aren't in alignment with the type of program you want to work, consider finding another sponsor.

What if I want to change sponsor?

There is no long-term commitment required between the sponsor and sponsee. If you feel a different person will better enhance your recovery, then it is suggested to gently let your current sponsor know. This is frequently done in Twelve Step programs, and many long-time members have had several different sponsors.

Being a Sponsor:

When should I consider myself ready to sponsor?

When you feel prepared to guide others through the Steps and you are willing to spend time and effort with a person, you are most likely ready. It is suggested that you be further along in the Steps than a potential sponsee. Check with your sponsor before you make a commitment to someone.

How do I become a sponsor?

Make it known that you're willing to sponsor, or talk about sponsorship. Many meetings will have some sort of sponsorship announcement. In virtual meetings, when someone is ready to sponsor, they will often place an asterisk in front of their name, such as *Name. Create the opportunity for someone to ask by making yourself available after meetings to talk with newcomers, especially when they announce they are looking for a sponsor.

What is the proper approach to sponsorship?

There is no proper approach. Many use similar methods as their own sponsors as a starting point on which to build. Each sponsor is different and free to work the way their experience dictates. Some sponsors are direct and outline the program as they see it. Some are more casual, guiding only when asked, allowing the newcomer to find their own way. Some approaches will fail. A sponsor is not responsible for anyone else's sobriety or their approach to the program.

Must I sponsor someone if asked?

There is no obligation to commit yourself to sponsorship. Because of the many benefits sponsorship provides, you may want to consider being their temporary sponsor. In time, you will know if the relationship is working and should become more permanent. If you are not comfortable sponsoring them, politely decline and encourage them to ask others.

How many people can a sponsor work with?

Only you can decide how many sponsees is best for you. Different people have different amounts of time and energy to apply to the program. Caution needs to be exercised to avoid becoming

Additional physical detox symptoms experienced by some of our members include sweating, tremors or shaking, dizziness, impotency, and chronic fatigue. Coughing up phlegm can last a few weeks to well over six months.

Please consult with a medical professional if symptoms are severe or persist.

Reducing Discomfort

Self-care is key to reducing discomfort. There are many tools for self-care, and they look different for everyone. Peer support is the cornerstone of the MA program because it decreases isolation and builds a support network. Share with others in meetings about your experiences and ask others how they got through detoxing.

Be gentle with yourself! Give yourself a break and allow time for your body and mind to heal; remember you are detoxing. Try not to beat yourself up if you aren't in a regular routine and chores and other tasks don't get done. Offer yourself patience, kindness, and self-love. Journaling is an effective way to express yourself. Writing and sharing gratitude lists helps you to remember the reasons why you are getting sober and keep your focus on the positive.

Members find it helpful to practice mindfulness. There are a variety of ways to be more present and in the moment. Bring awareness to the five senses: try to identify some things you can hear, smell, taste, feel, and see. You can ground yourself by connecting with your physical body and surroundings. Alternating hot and cold showers can also help bring awareness into your body.

The 11th Step of MA includes meditation, however it can be started at any time or stage in recovery. Everyone meditates differently, and what works for some may not work for others. Many members find that guided meditations are helpful. Try 11th Step MA group meditation meetings found in the MA Meeting Finder. There are many styles of meditation that can be accessed online and in apps.

We suggest you try a variety of methods until you find a meditation practice that works for you.

Given that THC is stored within the body's fat cells, it is helpful to maintain a healthy, balanced diet and to drink plenty of water and clear liquids. Building a routine of mild to moderate exercise, such as taking short walks outdoors, can help foster a positive mindset and assist the body in speeding up the healing process.

For intense discomfort, see a medical professional, ideally one who is experienced with detoxing.

A Doctor's Opinion About Marijuana Addiction

" . . . MA meetings and the fellowship of other Marijuana Anonymous members provide the experience of loving kindness on a regular basis. In addition, the foundation of the MA program is spiritual. The personal care and loving attention expressed by others, and the spiritual practice embodied in the recommended Twelve Steps of the program, directly and positively affect the reward center, the part of the brain that has been primarily altered by addiction. This spiritual program of action provides the necessary healing to allow an addict to attain a new life in recovery from marijuana addiction: a life with hope."

Note: This pamphlet has been written by Marijuana Anonymous members in recovery. We are not medical professionals, and this pamphlet should not be construed as medical advice. Detoxing is different for everyone. Please talk to a medical professional and advocate for yourself if you think you have symptoms relating to Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS), Post Acute Withdrawal Syndrome (PAWS), or Cannabis-Induced Psychosis (CIP). We suggest that you research these conditions and read the pamphlet "A Doctor's Opinion About Marijuana Addiction" and other MA literature.

About Marijuana Detox



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**A Twelve Step Program of Recovery
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About Marijuana Detox

In spite of the common belief that there are no physiological or psychological effects of cannabis/marijuana addiction, a large number of recovering MA members experience withdrawal symptoms in some form as they stop using marijuana. For the purpose of this pamphlet, the words cannabis and marijuana are used interchangeably.

During withdrawal, the body works to reach a state of homeostasis while cleansing itself of lingering chemical influences. Detoxing can result in disruptions in brain chemistry and may be accompanied by mental and physical health repercussions for varying lengths of time. Alcohol and other drugs typically leave the body in a couple of days or weeks. THC (the active chemical in cannabis) is stored in the fat cells. Therefore, the body can retain THC for several months after quitting. This pamphlet has been written by MA members, not medical professionals, and any of the opinions expressed are personal experiences. Every body is different, and the length of detox time is unpredictable.

Marijuana Withdrawal Symptoms

Prior to quitting, there is no way of predicting who will be physically uncomfortable and who will not. Whether caused by physical or psychological addiction, cannabis/marijuana withdrawal symptoms present in many forms: emotional, mental, and physical.

Emotional Symptoms

“Regular, long-term use also results in activation of internal stress systems which try to keep brain function normal. These stress systems cause adverse feelings such as anxiety and dysphoria resulting in a fairly negative emotional state which is felt during withdrawal. This negative emotional state becomes much longer lasting and is relieved only by a return to use of marijuana or other drugs, unless the addict stops using altogether and for a substantial period of time, allowing the entire system to return to normal function. . . .

. . . Unfortunately, the part of the brain that identifies and helps people deal with problems is also affected by the addiction and the addict can’t see the problem for what it is, nor plan an effective way out of it.” – “A Doctor’s Opinion About Marijuana Addiction” (pamphlet)

An emotional rollercoaster is very common in early sobriety and may be intensified by some of the physical detox symptoms, such as loss of sleep. There are many emotional and psychological reasons that may have led someone into habitual and chronic marijuana use, and those reasons often still exist. Detoxing may be the very beginning of getting used to “life on life’s terms” and experiencing real feelings without a numbing agent, which can lead to heightened emotional levels. Erratic emotional responses are common and can last for some time as brain functions stabilize.

The most common symptom is fluctuations between depression and states of euphoria. Many MA members in early sobriety experience what is often called the “pink cloud,” feelings of extreme happiness, excitement, and glee; being overjoyed that they have found recovery. The pink cloud is met by states of sadness about the reality of the circumstances that brought us to recovery in the first place. It isn’t easy to take a hard look at ourselves, take an inventory of our wrongdoings, examine our character defects, and begin to address the life of an addict.

Anger is also very common: a slow-burning rage, constant irritability, sudden bursts of anger when least expected – anger with loved ones and oneself, anger at the world, and anger that we may have a problem with marijuana. The anger will eventually subside as your detox progresses and you participate in the MA program as suggested: going to meetings, finding a sponsor, and working the 12 Steps.

“When we stopped using marijuana, we didn’t automatically feel worthwhile and full of purpose. Our overwhelming feelings, character defects, and negative actions were still there. Sometimes they seemed even stronger than before, because we had no anesthetic to dull them. We were not problem users whose problems went away when we threw away our stash. When we stopped using,

we found we had a problem with living; we were addicts.” – Life with Hope, Step 2

Mental Symptoms

Chronic marijuana use tends to dampen the dreaming mechanism. In early sobriety, the ability to dream may return. They might be vivid, highly emotional dreams or nightmares. Dreams involving marijuana use (“using dreams”) are very common and considered a normal part of recovery.

Many people in early sobriety experience loss of concentration and memory. Some experience feelings of fear, anxiety, apathy, a loss in their sense of humor, and/or changes in sex drive. It takes time and patience to persevere through the variety of emotional detox symptoms, which is why MA utilizes peer support to work the 12 Steps of recovery.

Physical Symptoms

Physical symptoms and their duration will vary from person to person. If you experience severe or long-lasting symptoms, please contact a medical professional.

A common physical symptom is headaches. For those who experience them, the first few sober days can be intense, and headaches can last weeks to a couple of months, or longer. Another common physical symptom is difficulty sleeping. This can range from no sleep at all, to occasional sleeplessness, and can last days to months. Difficulty sleeping can be due to restlessness, the vivid dreaming mentioned above, and/or night sweats.

Many recovering addicts have eating problems for the first few days or weeks. The main symptoms are loss of appetite sometimes causing temporary weight loss, digestion problems, cramps after eating, nausea– and in extreme cases, vomiting. If these symptoms persist, contact a medical professional, as they may be indicators of Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS).

Who is a Marijuana Addict?

We who are marijuana addicts know the answer to this question. Marijuana controls our lives! We lose interest in all else; our dreams go up in smoke. Ours is a progressive illness often leading us to addictions to other drugs, including alcohol. Our lives, our thinking, and our desires center around marijuana—scoring it, dealing it, and finding ways to stay high.

The Twelve Traditions of Marijuana Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon MA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority, a loving God whose expression may come through in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using marijuana.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or MA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the marijuana addict who still suffers.
6. MA groups ought never endorse, finance, or lend the MA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every MA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Marijuana Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. MA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Marijuana Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the MA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based upon attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, t.v., film, and other public media. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all fellow MA members.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Why Marijuana Anonymous?



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Why a separate program for marijuana addicts?

Marijuana Anonymous, like most other Twelve Step programs that came along after Alcoholics Anonymous, started “with a coffee pot and a resentment.” The addicts that started the first Marijuana Anonymous meetings didn’t feel comfortable sharing about their problems in the other programs aimed at chemical dependencies, and in some meetings, they were actually told that they couldn’t share. Eventually a few got enough sobriety (and enough courage) to start their own meetings aimed at their drug of choice, sometimes meeting in their own homes.

The diseases of alcoholism and addiction are the same no matter what the drug of choice, but sometimes the symptoms are different. You can use to go up or come down. Your substance of choice depends upon which way you want to go, and what you’ve been exposed to.

The early members of MA found that, for the most part, marijuana is a “high bottom” drug and they had a hard time identifying with some of the heavier substance abusers who had lost everything they had. Marijuana is also more tranquilizing than some of the speedier drugs and the early recovering pot addicts had a hard time identifying with addicts who used in order to get wired. Marijuana addicts tend to smoke their pot and just sit around and then sit around some more. They usually continue to function and even manage to hold on to their jobs, which sets them apart from many of the other substance abusers.

It is very difficult to go to a meeting and be called a “lightweight” by the other addicts when you are absolutely despondent about

what is happening to your life and are trying frantically to get clean. Being told to “Come back when you get a real addiction”, doesn’t help either. Marijuana addicts already have a real addiction.

Members of MA range from addicts who did nothing but marijuana, to addicts who did everything possible and could get off everything else but not pot. They needed special meetings aimed at coping with marijuana addiction. Now they have a refuge among people who know that pot addiction is nothing to joke about.

Where did Marijuana Anonymous start?

Marijuana Anonymous started in a number of places at almost the same time. It is a program whose time had come. Some of the original meetings weren’t even called Marijuana Anonymous. There was a Marijuana Smokers Anonymous in Orange County, California, a Marijuana Addicts Anonymous in the San Francisco Bay Area, and two groups called Marijuana Anonymous, one in Los Angeles, and the other in Seattle, Washington. They all came into being around 1986 and 1987.

How did MA become just one group?

Unity happened with a lot of hard work and faith by some of the early members of the groups. The different organizations began to hear of each other through members traveling and moving. In 1989 it was decided that a few people from each of the areas would get together and see if they had enough in common to form one united organization. Delegates were chosen from the societies in Orange, Los Angeles and the Bay Area to meet in Morro Bay, California (a half way point for those three groups) for their first “Unity

Conference.” The Seattle association was contacted by phone. The name Marijuana Anonymous was chosen as the Los Angeles group had already incorporated under that name. Some of the very basic ideas of Marijuana Anonymous were agreed upon during that first small meeting.

The delegates agreed to another meeting to be held in October of 1989. It was called the first General Service Conference. Delegates from the three California regions and the Washington group attended this meeting where the wording of the Steps and Traditions of Marijuana Anonymous was adopted.

Who started Marijuana Anonymous?

In theory, Bill W. did. As one of the founders of AA, he is the architect of all the Twelve Step programs. Different people (it always takes at least two for one addict to help another) started the Marijuana Anonymous meetings in each of the four original groups of Marijuana Anonymous. To remind us where the inspiration for our beginnings came from, the MA meeting format states:

“Marijuana Anonymous uses the basic Twelve Steps of Recovery founded by Alcoholics Anonymous, because it has been proven that the Twelve Step Recovery program works!”

By the end of the meeting, I felt much more relaxed & really glad that I found my way there. A few people approached me after the meeting to greet me, give me a phone list, and to tell me “Keep Coming Back.” Approximately two weeks after that first meeting, I had what I choose to call a “Spiritual Experience.” I was high and I felt really terrible. I realized that after nine years of smoking every day (morning, noon, and night), that I was an addict and that pot ruled my life. I never wanted to get high again. I feel very fortunate that this happened. I knew I could not get sober on my own, so I made a decision to make MA a part of my life.

The first thirty days were very difficult. My body was changing, mentally and physically, and I felt very strange. MA gave me a program I could believe in and follow. Soon I started looking forward to getting to meetings and sharing my feelings, as well as listening to others. I began to feel more comfortable and soon started talking to people after the meetings. Everyone was very supportive and I knew they really cared about me and my sobriety. I was even nominated back then for the refreshment commitment, which I gladly accepted. Being of service has been an added boost to my program. It is hard to put into words how my life has changed; I’m happy. My self-esteem and self-confidence have improved tenfold. I have never been more proud of anything I have ever done. These sober moments are very precious to me and I wouldn’t trade them for anything, not even a joint.

Then and Now

The Sixties: everybody was tuning in, turning on, and dropping out. I wanted to feel a part of it all. Love-ins, concerts, flowers in my hair, Beatles, Doors, Stones—even the music went against the “norm.” I’d swear to this day that The Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper told us to “smoke pot, smoke pot, everybody smoke pot.” So I did. Didn’t everybody?

Then my heroes started to die. First Hendrix, then Joplin, Morrison, and later on it would be Bonham and Belushi. The list is so long. I couldn’t see that I was on the same road. I was still mad at the world and questioning authority, filling up my resentment list daily, and drinking and using to cope. When I finally got sick and tired of feeling sick and tired, I called a hotline, found out about detox, checked into a hospital, and learned about the disease called addiction.

I knew alcohol was a problem, but I still figured I could go back to smoking dope after I took the time to clean out. A few weeks into sobriety and the cravings for pot were unbearable. I shared about it at a meeting and someone told me about MA. I went to a meeting the next night and knew I was home. I could easily identify with everybody. We were all trying to stop the same drug. Alcohol had brought me to my bottom,

but pot had kept me there. Talk about cunning, baffling, and powerful. Nothing fits that description better than marijuana.

I feel as if I’m finally usually happy, occasionally joyous, and definitely free from the desire to use marijuana. MA has given me so much. It’s given me friends I know I can count on, even when the going gets rough. It’s given me principles to live by, and an altered attitude not possible without the Twelve Steps and the people who live by them. I even have a Higher Power I choose to call God. For a recovering atheist, that’s saying a lot. I trust my Higher Power in a way I never thought possible. He gives me strength in ways I never knew before, & grants me serenity at times when it doesn’t even seem possible. I thank God daily for the gift of recovery and ask that He show me His will in a way that I can understand. He helps me solve my problems by leading the way to the right person, who gives me direction, or just grants me enough patience to figure it out for myself. Sometimes He just sticks a newcomer in front of me to remind me of where I come from. Oh sure, I fall back into my “stinkin’ thinkin’” sometimes, but I’m able to recognize it for what it is. I “Keep Coming Back” and “One Day At A Time,” I feel better. Thanks, God.

Why MA?

A lot of people in other Twelve Step programs ask the question, “Why Marijuana Anonymous?” I tell them that for twelve years, I was in and out of two other Twelve Step programs and could not put together any length of sobriety or stop smoking pot. I tell them that I could stop drinking and using other drugs for periods of time, but I just could not stop smoking pot. Marijuana was my drug of choice and the other drugs usually always followed a joint. Marijuana was how I started and ended my day. I didn’t do anything or go anywhere without pot. It was how I functioned. I tell them that I need to hear from people who smoked pot like I did. I need a program that primarily deals with marijuana.

Without MA, I don’t think I could have put together this much sobriety. I never could before I attended Marijuana Anonymous.

For my sobriety, I attend both MA and another Twelve Step program, because I am an addict and an alcoholic. I applaud all the Twelve Step programs, but MA will always be the foundation of my sobriety. I feel I belong.

Sharing Our Experience, Strength, and Hope: Personal Stories of Marijuana Addicts



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The Story of the Lotus Eaters

About 3000 years ago, the poet Homer told a story about a man called Odysseus and his voyage home to Greece following the Trojan Wars. Odysseus and his men met up with many exciting adventures along the way, but the most relevant to us is the story of his landing on the Island of the Lotus Eaters. The island was so beautiful that Odysseus wanted to stay there awhile & rest up. So he sent out some scouts to determine if the natives were friendly. Odysseus waited and waited, but the scouts never returned. What had happened was this: the scouts had indeed met up with the locals, the Lotus Eaters, who turned out to be very friendly. The Lotus Eaters even shared their food with the scouts. But the food—the lotus—was a kind of dope, and the scouts got wasted from it & forgot all about Odysseus, their mission, getting back to Greece...everything. All they wanted to do was hang out, eat lotus, and get high.

Lucky for them, Odysseus came and dragged them kicking & screaming back to the ship. He tied them to their seats & ordered the crew to row like hell, in case anyone else might eat the lotus & forget the way home. The story of Odysseus is about more than just a Greek guy in a boat. It's about the journey people take through life and the obstacles they meet along the way. The story of the Lotus Eaters speaks particularly to us dopeheads. As addicts, we were stuck in a Lotus Land; we forgot our mission; we forgot the other adventures that awaited us; we forgot about going home. Luckily, we each had within us our own Odysseus, our own Higher Power, which grabbed us by the collar and threw us back into the boat. So now we're rowing like hell. We may not know what's going to come next, but we're back on our way through life again.

Love Yourself First

The story of my recovery is the story of desire. What I desired was life, for I was living without desire. I did not know who I was, or what I wanted, or even how I felt. I couldn't remember anything about my life. I couldn't remember anything at all. I didn't have an identity because without memory and emotion, there is no identity and so I lived without being, because there was no one to be.

To live without a self requires a lot of doing, and I did a lot. I worked 70 hour weeks and I did marijuana continually, but the best and greatest abandonment of self was simply to merge my identity with a woman. (Although this also required more & more & more dope to really seem to work.)

Drugs never stopped working for me, but I stopped coping with work. I recognized I faced mental death if I continued, so I didn't. In the quiet desperation of simply

wanting to live, I grew a little bit and wanted to live enough to live life on life's terms. I did withdrawal and, at every point I could, I chose sobriety, even in pain. I did feelings. I really didn't want to, but after a while, I got used to them. I took an interest in other people and got close to them. I began to see who was really there instead of my delusions. I lost my second marriage this way, but any lie at all will end my sobriety and my life.

After a year's sobriety, I almost went out behind the fact that I was lying to myself and others. I was stealing (had been for many, many years), and calling it something else. In the ongoing development of my recovery, though, it just got to be too much all at once. I had to get straight with myself and God. Once I did, though, I was healed, and in a way I never knew possible before the program. The joy of my life today is awareness of the details of life and in having the honesty not to want to change them. Although I no longer consider myself "in love," there are many people I do love, and I love them for themselves alone. The greater prize and the hardest, though, is to love myself.

The First Step

I am a marijuana addict because when using pot, it was the most important thing in my life. More important than anybody or anything. It helped to suppress all the inadequacies I felt. It helped me not to feel the pain of not living up to expectations. It enabled me not to worry about anything. It helped me to not care about the things I really cared about. It enabled me to stay in my own little world and not deal with emotional feelings that would continually come up when I wasn't smoking. It would drive the fear away, but after a while, the fear would return.

Pot helped me not worry about not having a relationship with women, even though I wanted this to happen. Because of negative feelings about myself, I always thought deep down that I was worthless and didn't deserve to be happy. Instead of dealing with these issues I would smoke pot and the feelings would go away. Therefore, I never learned very many social skills or problem solving skills.

Problems would come up and they would seem too huge to deal with. I would smoke pot and look for the answers after smoking, because then the problems seemed smaller. In reality, they were only day-to-day issues that could be resolved if dealt with, instead of running away from them. I would smoke and not deal with the problems and let them fester inside until I thought, "I just can't handle it." I would try not to think about them, or go somewhere I could start all over, escape, and hope that would teach me how to deal with them the next time. But the next time, they would continue and I would do the same thing, over and over, until it was killing me.

Later, I started to turn to other things (alcohol, cocaine, gambling) in the hope that these things would give me

pleasure, or at least let me not care about the problems that followed me wherever I went, and that these feelings I carried around would go away. They didn't. All the alcohol and drugs did was push me farther down, to the point that I finally thought, "There has got to be a better way." I gave in and sought help: the First Step.

The Question of Honesty

After knowing and working on the Twelve Steps for 2.5 years, due to my concern over someone else's drinking, I came to the realization that honesty was missing in my life. Constant use of marijuana hadn't concerned me as I saw people at meetings chain-smoking cigarettes. "It's all a matter of choice," I rationalized. The question of honesty was raised at a moment when I was particularly receptive. For months, I had tried to follow the guidance of a therapist who suggested that smoking pot would probably interfere with the search for reality we were pursuing. I could never go a full week without reefer and it bothered me.

A few days before my move to California, a 12-Step acquaintance casually mentioned that what he loved most about his program was the honesty in his life. I made a decision that night that I would not look for a drug supplier when I arrived here. I also knew that my success rate for stopping on my own had been a joke. The day after I arrived, I attended my first drug program meeting. While I found that group only minimally similar to me, going there kept me clean. After a few weeks, I was persuaded that abstinence from alcohol also made sense. It was explained that even though I didn't consider myself a problem drinker, I was likely to increase my alcohol consumption if I weren't smoking pot. It also made sense that drinking might make me more receptive to slipping if I were offered pot while tipsy.

I was six months clean before being introduced to MA and I felt immediately comfortable. The people in our program have stories more similar to my own than those in any other Twelve Step rooms. I continue to make recovery the most important focus of my life. I go to meetings, have commitments, do lots of reading in the Big Book, use the phone regularly, and have a sponsor. I am hopeful about my future today regardless of many uncertainties. My relationship with my Higher Power continues to grow now that I have found the honesty that was missing from my life for 20 years.

Keep Coming Back

I will always remember my first MA meeting. I was scared & nervous, but I remember all of that melting away as the meeting started. Soon I realized, "This is where I need to be." I could relate to what I was hearing. Listening intently, I was amazed that there was a group of people just like me.

How should I conduct myself when I'm on a Panel?

First of all, remember that when you are on a panel, you do, in some way, represent Marijuana Anonymous, not just yourself. How you dress and the language you use reflects back on MA as a whole.

Here are some simple guidelines to follow when you're speaking on a panel:

- Avoid excessive use of profanity.
- Dress appropriately
- Tell your story but stay away from long drug-a-logues.

What Step and Tradition am I practicing by being on a Panel?

Step 12

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to marijuana addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Tradition 5

Each group has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the marijuana addict who still suffers.

What Traditions should I keep in mind when I speak on a Panel?

Tradition 10

Marijuana Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the MA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Tradition 11

Our public relations policy is based upon attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, film, and other public media. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all fellow MA members.

Tradition 12

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

How can I be on a Panel?

At the meeting level, your Group Service Representative can tell you how to contact the district H & I Committee. Or attend a District Service Committee meeting yourself and volunteer your services for an H & I panel.

Why H&I Panels?



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What is H&I?

H&I stands for Hospitals & Institutions and is a public service arm of our program that works toward spreading the recovery message of Marijuana Anonymous.

District H&I committees reach out locally to hospitals and institutions (rehab centers, jails, schools, etc.) to make them aware that there is a Twelve Step program that addresses marijuana addiction. The H&I Committee offers to plan and arrange panels to speak to residents, inmates, students, etc.

What is a Panel?

A panel is a small group of Marijuana Anonymous members that convenes at an institution to speak about recovery. Each panel member shares experience, strength, and hope by telling his or her own story: what it was like, what happened, and what it is like now, with the emphasis on recovery.

The panel is comprised of a panel leader and up to four other members. The recommended sobriety (free from all mind altering substances, including alcohol) for a panel leader is at least one year, and for panel speakers, at least six months.

Panels can occur weekly, monthly or at any other frequency that suits the setting.

Why should I be on a Panel?

Can you remember the first time you heard about sobriety, the first time you heard about Marijuana Anonymous or another Twelve Step program? Can you remember your first meeting, your first glimmer that there might be a better way to live—a happier, saner life free of marijuana?

Can you remember seeing hope in the eyes of another and the desire for change that inspired in you?

You can be the person that helps change the course of another addict's life by serving on a panel for an hour or two, telling your story and sharing your strength and hope.

You can give back some of what you've received by sharing the miracle of your own recovery and sobriety.

H&I is one of the most rewarding of all services we can do in recovery. This is what some of our members have said about being on MA panels:

—
“***Do a panel!*** This program doesn't owe you anything, you owe it. If you are reading this now and you're sober, you owe it to your sobriety to share with others what you've got.”
—

“One of the greatest gifts I've received in my sobriety was when I saw a man take a one year cake in Marijuana Anonymous. One year prior, I shared on a panel where he had been a patient. He came to

Marijuana Anonymous because of that panel and what he heard. To see him take a cake was a feeling like I've never known before!”
—

“...On page 89 in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, it is summed up perfectly—‘Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail’. We find this to be a fact for marijuana addicts too.”
—

“Panels give me the opportunity to share with others my accomplishments in sobriety, and that the same is possible for any addict. If I can do it, you can do it!”
—

“All I can do is share my own experience strength and hope, to let you know where I came from, and where I am now. My greatest reward from all of this is when someone comes up to me after a panel to say they have felt the same way.”
—

“I had to detox in a hospital, and the main thing that kept me there at a time when I was so miserable all I wanted to do was go home and use, was panels coming in and sharing, showing us by their caring actions that it does get better. The opportunity to return that favor is the most rewarding commitment I can take.”

The principles of this program are something suggested or achieved by working the Steps. The Steps are the tools to be used to discover the principles. Of course, this is a program of action and a personal thing, an individual program, so each person will probably find their own principles for themselves. But, when all of these principles are given meaning and purpose through love—love of God, and of others—and respect for ourselves, then they truly become the heart of our program of Marijuana Anonymous. With a deep sense of gratitude and the help of a Power greater than ourselves, we can live in emotional and physical sobriety with serenity and comfort—one day at a time.

The concept of one addict helping another and the privilege of practicing the Twelve Steps are very special gifts to marijuana addicts. The fact is that for thousands of years drug addicts and alcoholics had little or no hope of arresting their disease. For centuries upon centuries the disease was recognized, including the fact that it was sometimes familial. The Greek essayist Plutarch (born 46 A.D.) noted nearly two thousand years ago that, “Drunkards beget drunkards.” Recognizing the problem as a disease did nothing to arrest or cure it.

In recent centuries all types of cures were attempted by the medical professions, including incarceration in mental institutions. None of their

remedies seemed to work. Every once in a while, through some miracle or another, an addict or alcoholic would stop using their drug of choice. However, apparently no one could figure out why one addict stopped and the next one thousand addicts didn’t.

In 1935 all of that changed when two alcoholics discovered that together they could do something they had not been able to do alone. That was the beginning of Alcoholics Anonymous. In 1953 the same principal of one addict helping another was used to start Narcotics Anonymous. We are deeply grateful to both of those programs for pioneering a new way of life for us and proving how one addict helping another is of more assistance than all of the medical knowledge in the world.

The Twelve Steps of Marijuana Anonymous are adapted from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is the foundation of our program. These Steps are recommended, not required, but for decades they have proved to be unparalleled for a long range program of living in recovery.

Working the Program



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How It Works

The practice of rigorous honesty, of opening our hearts and minds, and the willingness to go to any lengths to have a spiritual awakening are essential to our recovery.

Our old ideas and ways of life no longer work for us. Our suffering shows us that we need to let go absolutely. We surrender ourselves to a Power greater than ourselves.

Here are the Steps we take which are suggested for recovery:

1. We admitted we were powerless over marijuana, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, *as we understood God*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood God*, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to marijuana addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Do not be discouraged, none of us are saints. Our program is not easy, but it is simple. We strive for progress, not perfection. Our experiences, before and after we entered recovery, teach us three important ideas:

- That we are marijuana addicts and cannot manage our own lives;
- That probably no human power can relieve our addiction; and
- That our Higher Power can and will, if sought.

We say, "we take" these Steps, not "we took" them, because we live these Steps continually. This is a program guided by spiritual principles, not a religious program. We have lived too long in our own small world and this is how we stop being the center of the universe and learn to turn our focus outward. We turn our lives over to a Power greater than ourselves, clean our own house, and work with other marijuana addicts; both getting help from and giving help to them. The *HOW* of this program is that we must be *Honest* not only in the practice of this program but in all of our affairs, *Open* minded about this new way of life, and *Willing* to take direction and sincerely try the precepts of this approach to life. Living in this manner and practicing the spiritual principles of these Steps in all of our affairs, we can and do arrest our disease—*one day at a time*.

In working the First Step, we at last found the courage to face the truth and tell it; we were practicing the principle of *Honesty*.

In working the Second Step, we were practicing the principle of *Hope*.

In working the Third Step, we were practicing the principle of *Faith*.

In working the Fourth Step, we were practicing the principle of *Courage*.

In working the Fifth Step, we were practicing the principle of *Integrity*.

In working the Sixth Step, we were practicing the principle of *Willingness*.

In working the Seventh Step, we were practicing the principle of *Humility*.

In working the Eighth Step, we were practicing the principles of *Love* and *Forgiveness*.

In working the Ninth Step, we were practicing the principle of *Justice*.

In working the Tenth Step, we were practicing the principle of *Perseverance*.

In working the Eleventh Step, we were practicing the principle of *Spiritual Awareness*.

In working the Twelfth Step, we were practicing the principle of *Service*.

overeat, become addicted to our jobs, find ourselves on shopping sprees we can't afford, etc.

In fact, because of our past addictive behavior, we even have to be very careful of prescribed medications! We addicts have a dangerous tendency to self-medicate. If the doctor tells us to take one pill, we figure two will be better. If we have three pills left over after an injury or surgery, we save them instead of throwing them away. After all, we tell ourselves, we might need them the next time we are in real (or imagined) physical pain. We cannot deviate from prescribed use without placing our sobriety in jeopardy. As recovering marijuana addicts, we have learned that we must be very vigilant about our sobriety at all times, in all ways.

The belief that marijuana cannot be addictive is widely circulated throughout the world. Well, somehow, we managed to get addicted to this "non-addictive" substance. We recovering marijuana addicts don't need to play with fire by checking out other addictive substances.

To reiterate, the only requirement for membership in Marijuana Anonymous is a desire to stop using marijuana. It

is important, however, to recognize the potential to create another problem as we strive to recover from this one.

Excerpted from the fourth paragraph of Step 2 in Life with Hope

We came to realize that trying to fix our lives with marijuana hadn't worked. Marijuana had once seemed to be the most effective way to help us cope with the problem of living, at least temporarily. When we stopped using marijuana, we didn't automatically feel worthwhile and full of purpose. Our overwhelming feelings, character defects, and negative actions were still there. Sometimes they seemed even stronger than before, because we had no anesthetic to dull them. We were not problem users whose problems went away when we threw away our stash. When we stopped using, we found we had a problem with living; we were addicts.

Dangers of Cross Addiction



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Marijuana Anonymous

Tradition 3

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using marijuana.

Marijuana Anonymous was formed so that marijuana abusers would have a safe haven for recovery, without being ridiculed for “only” being marijuana addicts. However, many of us have found that the only way that we can keep our sobriety is to also abstain from alcohol and all other mind-altering substances (unless those other substances are taken as prescribed by a healthcare provider). As stated in our Third Tradition, the only requirement for membership in Marijuana Anonymous is a desire to stop using marijuana. In fact, there’s not even a demand that we stop using, only that we have a desire to stop. There is no mention of alcohol or any other substances. This is to adhere to the “singleness of purpose” concept.

When we give up the drug of our choice, a void is created. The initial struggle to abstain from marijuana use often leaves us vulnerable. For the first time in years, we no longer have marijuana clouding our feelings; we don’t even have a name for some of these feelings. We may

experience happiness, pleasure, satisfaction, enjoyment, fulfillment, and other positive feelings; we may also experience anger, depression, resentment, sorrow, dejection, fear, emptiness, and other negative feelings. To fill these voids or numb the pain, we may start to use, or increase the use of, other substances such as alcohol, cocaine, pills, or other drugs. Since we’ve never done feelings, of any kind, too well, we may use mind or mood altering chemicals to take the edge off our powerful new feelings, both positive and negative. Although we may not now be addicted to these substances, their use can lower our inhibitions and leave us open to repeating old patterns of thinking and behavior, which can lead back to marijuana use or on to new addictions.

Many of the addicts who come to MA have just not been able to stay clean and sober. While a few have gone back to using marijuana right from the start, most have started with another substance. It is usually alcohol since it’s so readily available and socially acceptable. They felt safe since alcohol had not been a problem for them in the past.

They also wanted to be “a part of”, and not be different from their non-addict friends. However, we are different from our non-addict friends! That’s one of the things we have to learn if we are going to turn our lives around. There is an old saying, “Once you’re a pickle, you cannot go back to being a cucumber.” For many of us, a drink on Friday night can become a few drinks on Friday night, and then a few drinks a few nights a week, and so on and so on. We know the story. We played that one out with marijuana. Or maybe we just have a couple of drinks, lower our resistance, then pick up a joint and there we are out using again.

Those of us who have managed to put together a few years in this program have learned to think of other substances as something we haven’t gotten addicted to...yet. It doesn’t mean we can’t and won’t, if given a chance. The fact that we became addicted to marijuana reflects a tendency towards behavior that may lead to cross addiction (addiction to other substances). Particularly during the first few shaky months, we might find ourselves drawn to new obsessive behavior, that might have been unacceptable before. We may

The MA World Service Conference is the forum where we conduct the official business meeting(s) of the Members that allow Marijuana Anonymous to exist and continue as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, as required per our Bylaws. During the Conference, members from around the world gather to discuss matters which affect Marijuana Anonymous as a whole and come to group conscience decisions as we consider how best to move forward as a community, including the election of Trustees.

“Effective leadership qualities are essential for Trustees, who are entrusted with the responsibility of making final decisions regarding general World Service business and finances.”

- *Eighth Concept for Service*

As the Directors and Officers of MA World Services, each Trustee is assigned to a particular role (*President, Secretary, Treasurer, Literature, Public Information, Policies & Procedures, etc.*) and traditionally serves as Chairperson for the associated World Service Committee. All MA members are invited and encouraged to participate in any number of Committees. MA World Services Committees serve as an example for how to conduct subcommittees at the District-level. For more information see Committee Handbooks: MA12.org/Library

A New Leaf Publications (ANLP) is the publishing department of MA and is responsible for MA literature after its creation. As a DBA or “doing business as” of MA World Services, ANLP keeps the spiritual message of recovery separate from financial and property concerns. The department oversees and administers the publication, distribution, and business of MA literature for the purpose of carrying the message of recovery and service to the community of MA and to outside entities. A New Leaf Publications also curates and

distributes MA’s monthly creative publication. *A New Leaf* celebrates MA members’ creativity and seeks to share the message of hope in recovery through the many creative submissions by our community—unifying us in our shared experiences as marijuana / cannabis addicts.

Goal of the Service Structure: *Fulfilling our Primary Purpose*

The pyramid is inverted because the individual members, meetings, and groups are the largest and most vital part of the community of MA. Without recovering addicts, there would be no need for meetings; without meetings there would be no need for districts; without districts, no need for World Services. This point cannot be stressed enough. The MA Service Structure exists entirely to serve the meetings, groups, members, and those who have not yet found MA.

“The Marijuana Anonymous Service Structure should be one of selfless service and not of power or government ensuring that the spiritual principles of the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions, and the warranties of Article 12 of the Conference Charter are always maintained.”

- *Twelfth Concept for Service*

The group service representatives (GSRs), delegates, committee members, trustees, and special workers are all trusted servants. They do not govern. Each individual serves at the direction and desire of the MA community, with only a loving Higher Power as the ultimate authority. All service positions at any level should be accepted with the desire to serve the fellowship.

The MA Service Manual is an invaluable tool for all MA members in service positions along with the other MA Service Materials. For print and digital copies visit the ANLP website: ANLP12.org

MA’s Service Structure



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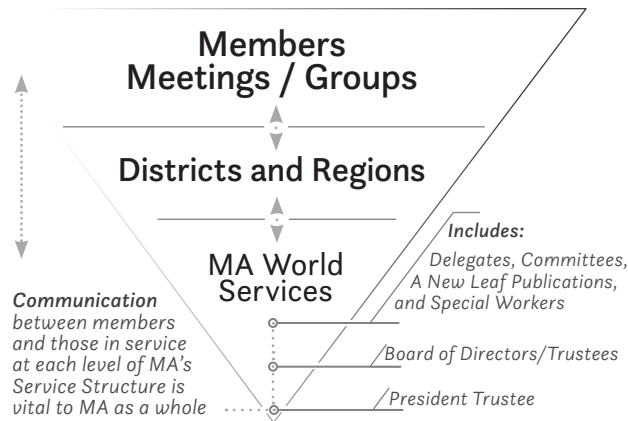
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MA's Service Structure

"The Marijuana Anonymous Service Structure was created to give the groups the freedom to carry out our society's primary purpose of carrying the message to marijuana addicts."

-First Concept for Service



The Inverted Pyramid

The Service Structure of Marijuana Anonymous is described as an inverted pyramid which includes three levels. Members, Meetings, and Groups make up the broad base at the top of the pyramid. The middle level consists of Districts and Regions. The tip, or the smallest portion of the pyramid at the bottom, represents MA World Services, which includes Delegates, Committees, A New Leaf Publications, Special Workers, and the Board of Directors/Trustees.

"The integrity of our Service Structure depends on continued unity of Marijuana Anonymous Groups, Districts, and World Services through effective communication."

- Tenth Concept for Service

Recovery, unity, and service are the pillars of our program. There are various methods of communication between the different service levels. Frequent, healthy communication and cooperation between all levels of service is vital to the unity of MA.

Meetings / Groups

The meeting or group is the primary structure in MA and consists of two or more marijuana addicts who meet on a regular basis. Each meeting is autonomous; however, compliance with each of the Twelve Traditions is vital for all meetings.

"Group conscience is the spiritual means by which service decisions are made."

- Fifth Concept for Service

Hosting regular business meetings is vital for groups to survive and grow. The health of a meeting and its ability to carry the message is contingent on attendees becoming participating members through regular rotation of service. The minimum Service Structure of the group consists of a secretary or chairperson and treasurer. The service duties may differ depending on the meeting venue (online, phone, or in-person). If the group is affiliated with a district, then a group service representative (GSR) is also needed to serve as liaison between the meeting and the district. The Seventh Concept for Service reminds us, "the scope of responsibility and authority of every service position should be well defined to ensure accountability of all service positions as well as the ability to perform each position."

Districts and Regions

A district or region is a service body containing a number of groups. Generally limited by some type of boundaries, districts can be geographical, virtual, or otherwise self-defined. The main difference between a district and region is that "districts" have been officially recognized (*inducted*) by the MA World Service Conference and are invited to send representatives (*Delegates*) to each year's business Conference to vote on important matters affecting MA as a whole. Before becoming an official district, these collections of groups operate as a "region."

The Second Concept for Service states, "the ultimate authority and responsibility for service in

Marijuana Anonymous is the collective conscience of the groups." The primary way a district serves its meetings and groups is by uniting them. Districts provide assistance to meetings in need of support and as a result, the groups are healthier. With this strengthened community, there are more service opportunities for local members and ultimately it creates the fellowship we crave in connecting with other addicts.

As each meeting is autonomous, so is each district, *except in matters that affect MA as a whole*. Districts meet periodically, usually once a month. This business meeting is called the District Service Committee (DSC) and is open to all MA members. Subcommittee reports are given with updates on projects and initiatives are discussed. It is vital that all group service representatives be present at these DSC meetings as liaisons between the group and the district.

Districts elect two Delegates and an Alternate Delegate to represent their district as liaisons to World Services. Delegates attend the MA World Service Conference participating in decisions and voting on policies affecting MA as a whole. Delegates have an important responsibility during discussions to report the collective group conscience of the district which they represent and to vote as a Member of the Conference Body using their own independent judgment as a delegated trusted servant.

World Services

Marijuana Anonymous World Services exists to support the rest of the fellowship and serve the districts, meetings/groups, and members. MA World Services is primarily comprised of volunteer members and carries out the necessary business and legal affairs of Marijuana Anonymous as a whole. MA also employs paid professionals, known as Special Workers, who provide their specialty skills to support Trustees and the rest of the Service Structure.

The MA Service Manual includes information about many of these positions. Meeting officer positions have suggested term limits. Rotation ensures that *everyone has the chance to serve and prevents the concentration of power among a limited few*. We remember that *humility is the spiritual essence of anonymity*.

Business Meetings, Informed Group Conscience, and Group Inventories

Business Meetings are held on a periodic basis. They are an opportunity to vote on meeting procedures and formats, financial matters, and the election of officers. All meeting officers should attend, and all group members are encouraged to participate.

When a meeting makes decisions, we seek an *informed group conscience*. This is an expression of the members' collective desires rather than a dominant opinion or simple yes/no count. *Informed* means that pertinent information has been studied, and that all points of view have been given equal consideration. We make a special effort to seek unanimity, if possible, before the group takes definitive action.

Group Inventory is the exploration of how well we are fulfilling our primary purpose. We examine our Twelve Traditions, one at a time, and determine how well our group is adhering to these principles.

Our Financial Contributions

Every MA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

(MA Tradition Seven)

As MA members, we take responsibility for our recovery as well as our financial obligations. There are no dues or fees for membership. Everyone is welcome to attend regardless of their financial status.

Our group may have expenses such as rent; copies of literature, phone, and meeting lists; and refreshments. We "pass the basket" to give everyone a chance to help support our group.

After expenses are covered (it is wise to keep a small prudent reserve), remaining funds are sent to the District for the services it provides. The District, in turn, sends its surplus to MA World Services. Some meetings divide their contributions between the District and MA World Services. MA does not accept outside contributions. This ensures that we remain indebted to no one, and that we remain true to our primary purpose. We are a spiritual, not a financial or political organization.

Fellowship and Socializing

Socializing often takes place before or after a meeting. It helps us develop a support group of clean and sober friends. It is a chance to deepen communication and explore concerns which may not have been discussed thoroughly during our meetings. Deep and lasting friendships often result. We make special efforts to always welcome newcomers into our groups. We avoid getting stuck in cliques and excluding anyone.

Starting an MA Meeting

Starting a meeting is a serious commitment. A few dedicated members must be prepared to "be there" for months as you gain a healthy core of committed members.

To start an MA meeting, all you need are two or more addicts and a place to meet. You can get a Starter Kit, which includes literature, suggested meeting formats, and other supplies, by contacting MA World Services Outreach Trustee. You'll need to get the word out in your community about your meeting. Being mindful of our Traditions, you may wish to circulate flyers, put ads in local papers, contact local hospitals and counseling agencies, or post flyers at local businesses.

If you are in an existing district, send a representative to the monthly District Service Committee meeting for assistance and supplies. Service manuals and copies of our book, *Life with Hope*, can be ordered from *A New Leaf Publications*.

The MA Meeting and the Home Group



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What is MA's Primary Purpose?

Each group has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the marijuana addict who still suffers.

(MA Tradition Five)

Our message is one of hope and promise that any addict can stop using marijuana, lose the obsession and desire to do so, and can discover a better way of life by following spiritual principles one day at a time.

Who is an MA member?

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using marijuana.

(MA Tradition Three)

Membership is a personal decision. We do not measure anyone else's desire to stay free of marijuana. We welcome all who are curious and interested in attending open meetings (some meetings are for addicts only). After attending meetings for a period of time, many people choose to identify themselves as **members**.

The Purpose of Our Meetings

The meeting is a safe place where marijuana addicts share their experience, strength, and hope, and learn about recovery. The healing power of one addict helping another is without equal. Only an addict can truly identify with another addict. By attending meetings, we nurture our own recovery from the disease of addiction, and help others recover as well. We experience a valued sense of belonging, security, and stability.

About Groups and Meetings

In Marijuana Anonymous, the terms **Group** and **Meeting** are generally synonymous. (In some other Twelve Step fellowships, there are distinct differences between groups and meetings.) MA does have a few groups in which more than one meeting may share common officers and a representative to the District. In most cases, however, each MA meeting has its own officers and representative(s) to the District and is, in effect, a group.

Choosing a Home Group

Many members choose a specific meeting as their home group, and attend this meeting regularly. Here we are introduced to the idea of sponsorship and the practice of service. We eventually participate in the group's business, and realize the significance of our impact on the group consciousness.

When we choose a meeting as our home group, we make a commitment to support the meeting's long-term success. This practice ensures a core of members are there to participate, guide, and serve. Everyone benefits from our experience and knowledge of the group's history. New members learn from us the skills needed to maintain the group.

Suggested Meeting Procedures

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or MA as a whole.

(MA Tradition Four)

MA recognizes that *all meetings are free to choose and design their format* to best fit the group's needs. In the spirit of unity, however, we encourage all meetings to start with the MA Preamble, and to include the reading of MA's *How It Works* (Twelve Steps), and our Twelve Traditions. Other suggested readings may include *The Twelve Questions of Marijuana Anonymous*, *Dangers of Cross Addiction*, and *Who is a Marijuana Addict?*

Most groups hand out sobriety chips to acknowledge sobriety milestones and birthdays. Meetings usually include announcements from the group's Secretary and a report about District matters from the Group Service Representative (GSR). Most meetings open and close with a prayer, such as the *Serenity Prayer*.

There are several types of meeting formats. Some meetings may combine them to some extent.

Participation Meetings

Encourage members to share their reflections on the program, their experiences, their problems, and their solutions.

Speaker Meetings

Enlist a specific member to share his or her experience, strength, and hope.

Book and Step Study Meetings

Specifically study various recovery-oriented materials.

Topic Discussion Meetings

Choose to discuss specific recovery-oriented topics, usually chosen by the meeting's leader.

Other possibilities include

Candlelight Meetings, Meditation Meetings, and Online Meetings.

We show consideration and respect for each other by being on time and listening to whatever is being said. We consciously avoid cross-talk (which includes side conversations, disrespectful gestures, comments on other members' shares, and any other interruptions).

It is essential that we respect each other's confidentiality and anonymity. No one should ever find themselves hesitant to go to a meeting because they feel unsafe. We don't go to meetings looking for romance or to promote our business interests.

Group Service and Commitments

Making a commitment to service work helps us stay clean and sober, and to **keep coming back**. It gives us the opportunity to practice loving unselfishness and benefits our own recovery, as well as the recovery of every member in our group.

Each MA meeting has volunteers to perform certain duties for the group. A meeting needs a Secretary. As a meeting grows, you'll need to select a Treasurer, a Literature Person, and—depending on whether an MA District has been established—a Group Service Representative to the District. Other service positions might include a Chip Person, a Refreshments Person, a Greeter, a Timer, and a Clean-Up Coordinator.

that was what my new “cool” friends were into. The next three years were filled with many highs and lows, and everything seemed so superficial, including my friendships. This made me sad and depressed. I believe this was my “rock bottom.”

I realized I could not live this way. There was one problem: I could not stop the routine of using drugs. It took being arrested twice, losing my license for two years, and my lawyer suggesting Twelve Step meetings before I walked into Marijuana Anonymous.

Since then, my attitude and actions have changed and so has my direction in life. I do see a future in water polo. Luckily, I haven’t killed my chance in athletics. Hopefully, I haven’t killed all those relationships I damaged while I was using drugs. Either way, I know that my first priority is staying sober and keeping a clean head. Keep Coming Back. It works if you work it.

MY LOVE OF POT STARTED the first time I got stoned. I was 14. The first time I smoked pot I didn’t see the point, because I didn’t feel high. I’d been drinking for a year already and I liked alcohol. The first time I did feel stoned from weed, I dropped the bottle and picked up the pipe. That was the beginning of 2 years of hell. Since I thought my parents were idiots, I could “act sober” around them.

For the first few months, I didn’t think pot controlled my life because I didn’t smoke like everyone else. I just smoked on occasion. Once I got to high school, I saw getting high as a great opportunity to make friends. I eventually got into the stoner circle, but I never felt a part of that crowd, because I didn’t smoke like them.

My parents knew what was up. My 1.6 grade point average was a big clue that I had something more important to do than homework. When I got caught dealing, my parents decided to raid my room. They found everything but the pot I had on me. I didn’t care. I smoked out the day after I got caught. So, I

was busted. Big deal. I promised to go to MA, but I really didn’t intend to stay sober. I didn’t want to be in a room full of addicts, because I thought I could stop anytime I wanted to. I just didn’t want to.

Soon after, I was caught shoplifting. My mom and dad came and picked me up. Another slap on the wrist. I stopped getting high for about 2 months, but when I started again, it was like I never stopped. My home life was awful. I was in a constant battle with my parents and my little brother was being hurt as a result of my selfishness. I thought I was the only person in the whole world.

I was using every day when everything finally hit the fan. My dad broke my guitars, so I ran away. I was caught one week later in Santa Barbara. I vowed never to use again. I told my parents that I had a problem, and I needed help. I came into MA a week later. Since then, I haven’t smoked pot once. I have noticed a vast improvement in my life, and it can only get better. So, if you are new, the best advice I can give you is read the literature, get a sponsor, and take a commitment. But more importantly, KEEP COMING BACK, because your life is still worth living.

We have found hope for the future in Marijuana Anonymous. Some of us have better relationships with our families. We have done better at school. We have found true friends, not just those who only hang out when there is weed. We have found the support of other marijuana addicts in MA.

Recovery is possible for people of all ages in Marijuana Anonymous. We cannot guarantee that we will never encounter situations where people are using. But, being clean and sober and working the Twelve Steps can help strengthen us against people and situations which may try to draw us back. Our stories portray the pain of addiction as well as the hope that comes from a drug-free life.

Stories by Teens



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There are more teenagers in Marijuana Anonymous today than at any time in the past. We come for many different reasons—parents tell us to come, the schools or the courts send us, some of us come on our own. A few of us have smoked pot for years, others only a few months. Many of us question whether we really are marijuana addicts. Some of us think we have not used long enough to be addicted to marijuana.

The symptoms of marijuana addiction are varied, but some are very obvious: ditching school, getting high before, during, and after school, dropping out of school, lying to our parents, etc. It does not take years to develop into a marijuana addict. It can happen very quickly. Peer pressure often plays a part in the process; some of us smoke pot to feel more comfortable in the presence of a certain person or crowd. Only you know if you are a marijuana addict. MA is here for any person, regardless of age.

This pamphlet contains stories written by teens.

THE FIRST TIME I SMOKED WEED was during the summer before 8th grade. I was really curious to see what it was all about. I had a few hits, but didn't really get stoned. Later, I smoked some more. I got so high I didn't even know what was going on. The next chance I got to get high, I jumped on it. The more I did it, the more I liked it. I loved the way pot played with my head.

Finally, I got caught. I was grounded for a while, but I went right back to it. That happened over and over until my parents decided to put me in a chemical dependency program. I managed to still smoke pot on the day furthest from my drug tests. I tried all those purification concoctions, but my dad eventually found out.

I was still determined not to let anybody rob me of my "God-given rights," so I continued to smoke bud and got "dirty" drug tests. My grades weren't really suffering so I saw no reason to stop. I kept getting into more trouble.

Finally, disaster struck. I was caught at school. My hearing to determine whether I am expelled or not happens very soon. My eyes have been opened. Getting caught once can ruin your life. I'm taking my 30 day chip today and I hope to get many more chips. By staying sober, I am getting all my privileges back. As for school, I hope to be allowed back in. My only job is to stay out of trouble.

I AM 16 YEARS OLD. When I was 11, I started smoking cigarettes because of a friend. At age 12, I started getting into alcohol and hanging out with gang members. At 13, I started smoking marijuana. At 14, I started doing hard drugs. I pulled a knife and swung at my dad. Luckily, I missed. I love my dad because he is the person who brought me into this world. I didn't realize that if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here.

When I was using, I had a lot of problems. Me and my dad got into a fight. We were hitting each other. The cops came. I tried to jump over the wall in my backyard. The cops grabbed me, and handcuffed me. My mom and dad had to decide whether to send me to juvenile hall. My mom said yes but my dad said no. I was released but that didn't stop me from using drugs.

When I was in the 7th grade, I got arrested for possession and use of marijuana. I was kicked out of school for a year. After that year, I didn't go back. I was kicked out by my parents. After 4 years of life on the streets, I was hanging out with my homies, getting drunk and doing dope every day.

Now I have been drug-free for almost a year. I finally came back to school. I am succeeding in school and life. I realize now that doing dope is not cool. I want to finish high school and go to college. I want to be an attorney. I hope my story touches somebody's heart, and I hope that whoever reads it will realize that doing drugs is not the way to go.

I AM A 16 YEAR OLD recovering marijuana addict. Like most teens, I went to MA for my parents mainly. I knew I had a

problem; however, I didn't really want to stop. Honestly, I didn't want to have real feelings again.

My parents put me in an outpatient program. The program made me go to one meeting a week. I chose MA because marijuana was my drug of choice. In MA, I learned about calling people for help.

At 30 days, when I took my chip, I was ready to be sober for myself. I knew if I didn't do it for myself it wouldn't mean anything and I could go out and use again. At 60 days, I decided to learn the Serenity Prayer and get a sponsor. I thought I didn't need a sponsor, didn't need to work the Steps. Staying clean would be enough. Now that I have a sponsor, I see how important she is. When I have a good day, she is happy for me. When I have a bad day, she tells me it is OK and makes me feel better. After 103 days clean and sober, I graduated the outpatient program.

I still have bad days. The people in MA comfort me. Bad days make me realize I need to thank God for the good days and not take them for granted.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON becomes an addict? Someone popular, with a lot of friends; or someone who is different from the rest, estranged from the popular crowd, with only a few friends, or none at all? The point I am trying to make is anyone can become an addict.

The only way that I figured this out was by becoming an addict myself. I used to be a guy who was always in the popular crowd. Right before high school began, I started being shunned by most of my friends. I had never lived with the fear that I had no friends, so I did almost anything to keep the two good friends I still had. One of the things I did was try pot for the first time. This was a big change from the way I lived when I was younger. I was an athlete, and the last thing I thought I would get into was drugs. Drugs prevented me from being the best athlete I could be.

I entered high school, where smoking pot was "cool." I continued to smoke pot because

doing. You may have the opportunity to discuss the unique problem of living with a loved one's addiction.

It is important to remember that addiction is a disease which greatly affects the addict and those who love the addict.

What is Marijuana Anonymous?

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 marijuana addiction.

The only requirement is a desire to stop using marijuana. There are no dues or fees for membership. MA is fully self-supporting through members' contributions. MA is not affiliated with any religious or secular institution or organization and has no opinion on any outside controversies or causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay free of marijuana and to help the addict who still suffers achieve the same freedom. This is done by practicing the suggested Twelve Steps of recovery and by being guided by the Twelve Traditions.

Ultimately, hope for recovery lies in the individual addict's ability to recognize that they have a problem and that they need help. The point at which one recognizes the need for help is commonly referred to as a "*bottom*" or a *moment of clarity*. The addict must have a true desire to stop using and the willingness to admit that the problem cannot be coped with alone.

That is why Marijuana Anonymous exists. We are marijuana addicts ourselves and this is our message: Any addict can stop using, lose the obsession and desire to do so, and discover an infinitely better way of life by following the spiritual principals contained in the Twelve Steps, one day at a time.

The Twelve Steps of Marijuana Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over marijuana, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, *as we understood God*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood God*, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to marijuana addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

For the Loved Ones of Marijuana Addicts



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Who is a Marijuana Addict?

A marijuana addict's life is controlled by marijuana. He or she loses interest in all else, their dreams go up in smoke. Marijuana addiction is a progressive illness often leading to addiction to other drugs, including alcohol. The lives, things and desires of marijuana addicts center around marijuana—scoring it, dealing it and finding ways to stay high.

Addiction is a progressive, long-term continuing problem. When an addict tries to stop using and fails because life without the drug is just too hard, that is addiction. Once an addict is convinced he or she cannot live without marijuana, the dependency becomes an obsession. When the addict uses even though he or she promised themselves they wouldn't, this is compulsion.

It is the nature of addiction that addicts don't believe they are ill. Marijuana addicts, in particular, tend to believe that they must be "OK" since there are much worse drugs, and other people whose lives are much worse off as a result of their using. That is denial.

We have found that addiction is a physical, mental and spiritual disease. The physical aspect is the compulsion—the inability to stop once we have started. The mental aspect is the obsession, or the overpowering desire to use, even when we are destroying our own lives and the lives of those we love. The spiritual aspect of the disease is our total self-centeredness.

Suggestions to Family Members and Friends of Marijuana Addicts

We addicts in recovery have found, through the Twelve Steps, that we are each responsible for ourselves and our actions. If a loved one helps divert a crisis for the addict, they take away the addict's opportunity to work it out, or fail. This will make it harder for the addict to perceive the problem and begin to seek the solution.

As the addict approaches their bottom and their disease worsens, family members and friends have a tendency to enable the addict, allowing them to postpone the ultimate repercussions of their using. Understandably, loved ones try

to ease the suffering the addict may be feeling because of the loyalty, love, caring, and a sense of responsibility. Family and friends may give money (which likely goes to buying more marijuana), buy food, pay rent and bills, bail them out of jail, etc. By trying to save the addict from him or herself, you are doing both yourself and the addict a disservice.

Addicts often try to manipulate loved ones though the use of guilt, fear, and anger. This is a very common tactic used (both consciously and unconsciously) by the addict to get what he or she wants by taking advantage of the emotions of those closest to him or her.

Once the Addict Begins Recovery, we Suggest You TRY:

- Encouraging the addict by changing your attitude and approach to the problem.
- Focusing on *yourself* and your own life. The newly clean addict will be doing the same. Living with an addict affects everyone involved.
- Detaching yourself from the addict's behavior. Detachment is not unkind. Detachment facilitates looking at the situations realistically and objectively, thereby making intelligent decisions possible.
- Being encouraging. There may be a significant amount of time while both you and the addict adjust to a new way of life. Try to nurture harmony and balance in this new life style.

Once the Addict Begins Recovery, we Suggest You AVOID:

- Trying to appease or patronize the addict.
- Checking up to see if the addict is stoned or in possession of drugs or alcohol. Yet, try not to let the addict take advantage of you. (This can be a tough one!)
- Scolding, nagging or blaming the addict about former use or newfound sobriety.
- Making threats, especially if you aren't prepared to carry them out.

Avoid False Expectations and Seek Understanding...

Once the addict stops using and begins the recovery process, don't expect that their faults and all the troubles of your shared lives will disappear. You might find, initially, exactly the opposite. Drug use was a coping mechanism for the addict. That coping mechanism will be "raw" for a while, especially when detoxing. Don't expect that a dramatic positive personality change will immediately take place.

When a marijuana addict begins going to meetings, there may be interference and conflict with your normal living schedule, routines, and family obligations. This is where your compassion, patience, and encouragement will be called upon. The time spent in the past by the addict in the pursuit of getting and staying high may now be spent going to meetings, reading recovery literature, speaking on the phone with other MA members, writing, meditating, and praying. These activities are of paramount importance to the newly clean addict and your support will be of great value.

You may be surprised to find that the addict now insists on attending to certain activities and responsibilities you felt compelled to take care of in the past. This is not a time to condemn past behavior, but an opportunity to practice trust and benevolence. The outcome will be the mutual reward of nurturing a new and healthy relationship.

We as individuals can only be responsible for ourselves. This applies to both the addict and the individual who cares. Take each day, one at a time. Be unafraid and happy. Try to adjust yourself to what is, today. Strengthen your own mind and body, exercise your own soul.

Support for You

Marijuana addiction in your children, spouse, or other loved ones is difficult for you to live with in healthy ways. You need support also. Some options are Twelve Step and support groups for friends and family, church groups, and therapy. These resources can teach you how to live your life more fully, regardless of what your loved ones are

Progress, Not Perfection

“...we almost all go through times during which we simply cannot, or will not, pray or meditate (for whatever reason). They are usually quite short in duration, and we do not criticize ourselves for such lapses when they happen. We simply resume as soon as we can. We are human; we are not perfect. We adhere to the Twelve Step concept of spiritual progress, not perfection.”

Life with Hope, 3rd Ed. p. 55

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Seeking Serenity

Meditation is a personal practice, but it does not have to be a solitary one.

There are countless meditation resources available, many of them for free, and we encourage you to explore them. There are meditation classes and retreats, and even Step 11 meetings.

Talking with MA members about how meditation helps their recovery may inspire you.

Beginning Meditation: An approach to Step 11



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Step 11

*“Sought through prayer
and meditation to improve
our conscious contact with
God, as we understood God,
praying only for knowledge
of God’s will for us
and the power
to carry that out.”*

•

Why Meditate?

Meditation can develop our coping skills and increase our serenity. Many MA members have found meditation to be an important part of their recovery.

It does a better job of calming us down than any substance we can put in our bodies. It can reduce stress and promote peace of mind. It can relax us and is good for the body as well as the soul.

Meditation allows us to access our inner quiet selves. We can, with this tool, improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power.

How do I Meditate?

There are many different ways to meditate. You cannot do it wrong. Here are some suggestions:

- Find a quiet space.
Anywhere will work.
- Sit comfortably,
so you can be still.
- Notice your breath
as you inhale and exhale.
- As thoughts come up,
notice them.
You do not have to follow
them. Let them pass,
like clouds in the sky.
- If you get distracted,
simply return your focus
to your breath.
- You can do this
for as long as you like.

Meditation and Step 11

*“Step Eleven gives us the
emotional sobriety to
practice the principles of our
program in all aspects of
our lives.”*

Life with Hope, 3rd Ed. p. 55

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It has been said that if prayer is talking to our higher power, meditation is listening to our higher power.

When we quiet our minds and learn to listen, we are better able to be of service to ourselves and others.

The frontal cortex is where we recognize problems, plan out solutions and make decisions.

Once one crosses the line into addiction the brain is altered in dramatic fashion. Reward center function diminishes during regular use of marijuana, so those activities & experiences one normally finds enjoyable and beneficial are no longer as important. The reward center now recognizes the continued use of marijuana as the priority, even more important than these other rewarding behaviors and drives, including survival. Other interests and activities diminish while a user becomes increasingly focused on marijuana. No conscious decisions are made resulting in these changes, they tend to just happen, but a user will certainly have reasons and justifications for them, & it becomes harder and harder to imagine going without marijuana.

Another change to the brain during active addiction is related to negative feelings users begin to have when marijuana is not being used for a period of time. These negative feelings grow and in some ways take over, until marijuana is used. Unfortunately, in later stages of addiction people don't really get high anymore. They are basically using to feel normal. The reward system has adjusted to long-term use by limiting its activity, thus they do not have the same strong responses to pleasure and drugs as in the past. Regular, long-term use also results in activation of internal stress systems which try to keep brain function normal. These stress systems cause adverse feelings such as anxiety and dysphoria resulting in a fairly negative emotional state which is felt during withdrawal. This negative emotional state becomes much longer lasting and is relieved only by a return to use of marijuana or other drugs, unless the addict stops using altogether and for a substantial period of time, allowing the entire system to return to normal function.

The third stage of addiction is related to craving. The frontal cortex, where we think things through, plan things out, and alter our behavior to meet our own needs, is the primary part of the brain that is altered. Craving can be described as preoccupation and anticipation of marijuana use. When those without addiction run into a minor problem due to their use (such as missing school or work due to tiredness after overusing one night), they think through what happened and determine what they want to change, and carry it out. In such a case, the individual may decide never to use as much so late into the evening. And they are likely never to do it again. However, someone addicted to marijuana may notice the same problem, and may consider a plan, but is very unlikely to carry out a reduction in use or an alteration of behavior over the long run. This is partially due to the altered function of the frontal cortex and an inability to fully recognize and carry out such a plan, especially when it means limiting use of something that has become such a priority.

As a result of addiction, the frontal lobes are no longer functioning at full capacity, limiting recognition of the problem and undermining any plans to fix it. The description in the

example above is not fact, but it is our current theoretical understanding of how addiction differs from casual drug use, and how the brain is changed by addiction. Addiction alters brain function, and perpetuates itself, becoming the primary focus of one's life. Unfortunately, the part of the brain that identifies and helps people deal with problems is also affected by the addiction and the addict can't see the problem for what it is, nor plan an effective way out of it. This is compounded by feeling rotten whenever the marijuana addict is not intoxicated.

Some people will wonder how a spiritual program can be effective for a chronic disease of the brain. The reward center is involved in all rewarding activities. It is there that recognition of differences in rewarding and pleasurable activities are noted and stored in memory. Highly rewarding experiences are prioritized and our memory of them ensures they are repeated.

Brain scanning studies have revealed that the experience of love as well as spiritual practices are recognized as rewarding. After a marijuana addict has stopped using, and brain function starts to return to normal, love and spirituality can be powerfully rewarding.

MA meetings and the fellowship of other Marijuana Anonymous members provide the experience of loving kindness on a regular basis. In addition, the foundation of the MA program is spiritual. The personal care and loving attention expressed by others, and the spiritual practice embodied in the recommended Twelve Steps of the program, directly and positively affect the reward center, the part of the brain that has been primarily altered by addiction. This spiritual program of action provides the necessary healing to allow an addict to attain a new life in recovery from marijuana addiction: a life with hope.

If you find aspects of your experience in this writing, you may be a marijuana addict, and may benefit from the MA program.

Marijuana Anonymous does not endorse the author of this content and the MA Traditions regarding anonymity do not apply to him. His name, title and current employer are provided so that readers have the information needed to independently evaluate the doctor's credentials. The medical opinion presented is based on the doctor's research and clinical experience as of 2015 and should not be construed as the last word on the subject of marijuana addiction. Marijuana Anonymous is not affiliated in any way with any foundation, institution or other organization, and has no opinion on outside issues.

A Doctor's Opinion About Marijuana Addiction



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A Doctor's Opinion about Marijuana Addiction

Marvin D. Seppala, MD
Chief Medical Officer
Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

I hope that this brief writing may provide those who are seeking help a general understanding of the disease of addiction, & some specific aspects of marijuana addiction. Many people say that marijuana is not addicting, but this is simply not accurate. People do become addicted to marijuana, just as they do to alcohol, opioids, & stimulants. Marijuana addiction differs from these other types of addictions primarily by the outward or social manifestations, but internally, the same pain and anguish exist.

Marijuana addiction is much less socially visible than alcoholism or heroin addiction, in which one can easily witness problems such as driving under the influence or development of serious infections like HIV or hepatitis. The other drugs tend to cause more obvious problems when addiction takes hold. Studies show that about 9% of those who use marijuana become addicted to it. The unfortunate truth is that the lack of serious, early consequences to marijuana addiction allow for a long, slow decline, often without recognition, resulting in later-stage addiction before the problem is confronted. An individual may wake up years into this chronic illness, without a reasonable understanding of how their life got so far off track. Often one has no major medical or legal problems, no sudden tragedy that drives the search for an answer. However, isolation from friends and family, loss of interest and lack of participation in those activities that used to bring joy, and the crushing weight of missed opportunities add up. If this is where you find yourself, you are reading the right book [Life with Hope].

Addiction, like many other diseases, has both environmental and genetic risk factors. The main risk factor for addiction, accounting for a bit over half of the risk, is in our genes. If you have addiction in your family, especially the immediate family, you are remarkably more likely to develop this disease. It does not matter if the others in the family are addicted to alcohol or cocaine, the risk of addiction to any substance increases with any addiction in the family. There is no single gene for addiction and we do not currently have genetic testing that identifies those at high risk. It appears that a few hundred genes may be involved, complicating the development of such a test. Some people have strong genetic risk factors and others weak; this is where the environmental risk factors come into play. If you have strong genetic risk, exposure to marijuana may by itself be enough

to result in addiction. If one of your parents has addiction, you are at least six times as likely as those without addiction in the family to develop addiction. If you have weak genetic risk, it may require significant environmental insults to tip the balance so that you become addicted. Environmental factors that increase risk of addiction include early-onset use of a drug, especially in the early teenage years. Research has shown that early use correlates with increased likelihood of addiction later in life. Psychiatric disorders increase the risk of addiction. Sexual, emotional and/or physical trauma increase the risk of addiction. Stress itself is a risk factor for addiction and has been found to contribute to relapse.

The use of marijuana often includes a quasi-scientific understanding of this drug, which is regularly described as a safe and harmless “herb” with no side effects and certainly no risk of addiction. Some people succumb to this notion without formal questioning. In the past, research has been hindered and a fair amount of misinformation about marijuana has been disseminated. Scientifically-defensible data about the true risks of regular marijuana use are more readily accessible today. This is not a new Reefer Madness. It is essential information for an accurate understanding of some of the risks associated with any drug that one has overused.

Most people can use marijuana without becoming addicted, and most who use occasionally will not suffer harmful effects. Still it is important to know the risks, especially considering the new forms and tremendously high levels of THC available to users. The higher the potency of the drug consumed, the higher the likelihood of addiction, and the higher the likelihood of adverse side effects. It is also important to recognize that marijuana has several hundred ingredients, many of which we know very little about. With new research, more information will be coming to help us understand both the good and bad effects of marijuana in all of its forms.

Research on regular users of marijuana has shown that certain brain regions are vulnerable and at risk for impairment. One of the primary findings has been an association between frequent use of marijuana during adolescence and into adulthood, with declines in IQ scores. There is clear evidence of impaired cognitive function during marijuana use and for several days following use, which undermines the ability to learn. School performance suffers when marijuana is used regularly, and regular users are more likely to drop out. The research is suggestive of long-term cognitive impairment, though additional research is needed to help determine if this is the case.

There is a link between marijuana use and psychosis, especially for those with a family history of psychosis. Marijuana use can also worsen the symptoms of those with schizophrenia. There are concerns about regular marijuana

use and cancer, but no frank correlation is described at this time. Correlations with other lung diseases are also being studied. There is clear evidence that immediate exposure to marijuana and long-term use impair driving. The impairment is different than that experienced with alcohol, but there is a direct correlation between blood THC concentration and impaired driving performance.

Scientists have discovered an internal cannabinoid system that includes receptors that respond to THC-like substances that we all produce naturally. This system is essential to cell function in the brain and other areas of the body. These cannabinoid receptors are in our brains for a reason, & THC overrides their normal capacity, contributing to the intoxicating experience of marijuana. The effects and side effects of marijuana are directly linked to this system.

Throughout my 27-year career working in addiction medicine, I have seen dramatic changes in our understanding of addiction; it is now defined as a chronic brain disease. This was certainly not the case when the original Twelve Steps were written in 1939, but even then it was referred to as a disease. Nor was addiction as a brain disease widely recognized when the MA text was first published in 1995. In fact, it is still not common knowledge, and some people continue to argue that addiction is not a disease—but if you are reading this book [Life with Hope], it is essential that you have a solid understanding of the problem you are facing, just as with any other disease.

Addiction research has developed since the 1950s and accelerated dramatically over the past 30 years. This research reveals a complex illness. It is often referred to as a bio-psycho-social-spiritual disease because its manifestations undermine all of these aspects of life. We now have a good understanding of the underlying brain pathology that results in addiction. Casual or social marijuana use is not addiction. Addiction manifests in a compulsion to seek and take the drug, loss of control over limiting intake of the drug, diminished recognition of significant problems, emergence of a negative emotional state, craving, chronicity and relapse. You can witness these features in the stories found in this book [Life with Hope].

Many parts of the brain are critical to addiction, but the two main parts involved are the reward center and the frontal cortex. The reward center of the brain is involved in recognizing and responding to rewarding activities and experiences. Basically, if we like something, this part of the brain helps us to remember that, and provides the ability to do it again. It is a subconscious area of the brain, characterized primarily by behavioral responses designed to keep us alive. Survival itself, then, is the ultimate function of the reward center. It is also where all drugs of abuse, including marijuana, play their primary role in addiction.

MA Member Experience Varies

The results of a survey of our members who have used CBD during their recovery were as follows:

- Some members believe that they benefit from CBD use for medical conditions in their recovery (under a doctor's advice and care)
- Some members believe CBD use was the cause of relapse and their return to active substance abuse
- Some want the difference highlighted between topical and ingested CBD use
- Some think CBD use is a "slippery slope"
- Some want other MA members to know that CBD can also have THC in it, and therefore is not an "outside issue"
- Some would rather MA World Services not address CBD use at all

The input we've received illustrates the uncertainty surrounding the issue of CBD at this time as well as the variety of opinions and experiences within our Fellowship. It would be divisive as well as inappropriate for MA World Services to take a concrete position on the use of CBD by our members. We have no evidence of the use of CBD benefitting any member's recovery from marijuana addiction. We do suggest that members using or considering the use of CBD talk to their doctor, their sponsor, and their home group. We urge members to be open-minded and humble as they consider what is best for them and their long-term recovery. Be on guard against addict behaviors or attitudes such as keeping your CBD use secret, obsessing about it, or increasing your use without your doctor's orders. It is worth remembering that Our *Life with Hope* text states in Step One: "We are powerless over marijuana in all of its forms."

Our Traditions

MA World Services doesn't have an opinion on the criteria that individual meetings use for giving sobriety chips to members, nor do we define qualifications for service at the meeting level. Tradition Four states that, "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or MA as a whole." Each group gets to decide their own parameters on the type of sobriety requirements they have for members during their monthly group conscience business meetings. MA World Services does not determine if using CBD impacts clean time.

There has been much discussion and a variety of opinions about whether or not the use of CBD is an "outside issue" within the meaning of Tradition Ten: "Marijuana Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the MA name ought never be drawn into public controversy." There is no clear group conscience at this time as to whether or not CBD use is an outside issue.

Tradition One emphasizes MA unity, and *Life with Hope* states in Step Twelve, "As we each work the program in our own special way, we discover the spiritual principles that we all have in common."

Marijuana Anonymous does not endorse the authors of the content under the section "Input from Two Career Experts in the Field of Addictions Treatment" or their employers. The medical opinions presented are based on their research and clinical experience, and should not be construed as the last word on the subject of CBD use. Marijuana Anonymous is not affiliated in any way with any foundation, institution, or other organization, and has no opinion on outside issues.

What about CBD?



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MA Has No Official Opinion on the Use of CBD

CBD products have burst onto the market in many states and seem to be advertised and available everywhere these days. As a result, MA World Services, Districts, local MA meetings, and sponsors are regularly asked for advice and guidance on the question of whether it is consistent with recovery for an MA member to use CBD, and whether individual meetings should give sobriety chips to those members. At World Services, we have been asked if MA has an official position or policy about members using CBD.

It's Hard To Know The Facts

An important consideration for any member giving thought to the use of CBD is that CBD is a constituent product of the marijuana plant and can be derived from both hemp and marijuana. If manufactured from marijuana, the likelihood of residual amounts of THC remaining in the finished product is a significant risk. As of this writing [January 2020] the regulations and standardization of CBD products are in constant flux. This makes it hard to know what exactly one gets in a CBD product. There is no US government watchdog overseeing the claims which producers make about the source of or ingredients in their CBD products. This substantially increases the risk that a user can ingest THC inadvertently.

Input from Two Career Experts in the Field of Addictions Treatment

Marvin D. Seppala, MD
Chief Medical Officer
Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

There is not yet good science about CBD that adequately proves its efficacy for some of the many ailments it is being touted to cure. It's a

big business and we need to be wary of their claims. The following is specific to ingested CBD. It is also not well controlled, thus there are small amounts of THC in the CBD which could possibly trigger the brain, thus triggering relapse is a question, or even providing some level of intoxication, depending on the amount ingested. Additionally, we have no idea how much THC is in the available CBD, therefore cannot distinguish one type from another for safety. The CBD that is being sold can result in recognition of THC on urine drug screens, which is also a problem for those being monitored.

The current regulatory situation I've seen described is as follows: The allowable amount of THC in CBD in states without legal THC is 0.3%. There are limits set in some states with medical THC at 3%, and in states with recreational THC, there may be no defined limit. The regulatory requirements are not necessarily being monitored, as a result I don't trust the manufacturers to actually follow the limits. I suspect it's cheaper for them not to.

At our treatment facilities, we've chosen not to allow its use. There's no way to know what people are getting at this time, nor what may happen as a result. Low amounts of CBD and THC could be safe for use in recovery, but may not be; as a result, it's best to completely avoid it.

Timmen L. Cermak, MD

First, there is no evidence of any addiction to CBD, nor are there any withdrawal symptoms when it is discontinued. It is, however, very mildly psychoactive, though evidence suggests that it reduces excess anxiety but does not lower anxiety below a person's baseline level. CBD does have many legitimate medical uses.

But I think people in recovery from marijuana abuse/addiction should treat CBD like any prescription medication, meaning that a person should be under the care of a physician for whatever symptoms s/he wants relief from. If the physician recommends a particular use of CBD, it should be taken according to the instructions. Any deviation should be in consultation with the physician. Why do I have this conservative view for people in recovery? Because ...

- People in recovery often keep looking for a pill/medicine to cure ills that working a program of recovery should be relied on for.
- A marijuana addict using CBD could be like an alcoholic drinking near beer—whistling past the graveyard, playing with fire to prove something.
- CBD is psychoactive, however mild; you can always take more.
- It remains impossible currently to be sure CBD derivatives do not include THC.

In the end it is the intention behind CBD's use that is important. If it represents a way of not having to give up marijuana entirely, this is a problem. If a physician is treating someone's arthritis, it is truly medicinal. This is a place for practicing rigorous honesty and transparency with others you trust.

You are very right to be concerned about getting what you want from the market these days. About 70% of preparations are not what they claim to be. I am hopeful that CBD tested by licensed labs and sold by licensed dispensaries in California will improve the situation.

manage my sleep problem is to make sure that I am very active during the day, preferably with some sort of cardio workout. I also try very hard to limit my caffeine intake, taking extra care to not drink any after 5 pm. I will take melatonin when I am having an extraordinarily hard time sleeping and I am under pressure to have to be up in the morning. However, I am reluctant to go this route because I don't like taking any type of medication if I can avoid it, and I seem to wake up a little foggy in the morning. For me, the sleep issues are the most intense for the first 1-2 weeks and will gradually start to subside after that.

During this entire period of sleep struggles, I start experiencing the most lucid dreams that I have ever had. While I am in my marijuana addiction, I do not usually notice my lack of dreams, but it always becomes abundantly clear once I start to cleanse my body of the THC. These dreams can be extremely vivid and seem so realistic that I have woken up in panics filled with fear and depression.

Additionally, depression and anxiety often plague me in the early days of detox. I think this is a result of a combination of my chemical dependency on THC and also the absolute need to change people, places, and things to successfully abstain from my drug of choice. I relate this to the grieving process, but it is just something that has to be done. I find that practicing acceptance and gratitude helps my depression and anxiety, while always remembering that acceptance is the answer to ALL of my problems today. This really is a simple program for difficult people. If I really dedicate myself to the program, including the fellowship, the Steps, and service, these unpleasant detox symptoms dissipate within 1-2 weeks. It also helped me to learn about PAWS (Post-Acute Withdrawal Syndrome). With the insane strength and power of modern marijuana, and its derivatives, it helped me a lot to learn that some of these psychological symptoms could last for up to 24 months. I found that physical exercises, prayer, and meditation helped me with these symptoms tremendously through all stages of detox!

The final detox symptom that I routinely experience is changes in my appetite and eating habits. Early in my detox, it usually manifests as a lack of appetite and eating. For the first week or two without pot, I just don't seem to have the desire and excitement to eat and consume beverages the way that I do while under the influence of marijuana. This lack of nutrition also impacts the above symptoms of sleep, depression, and anxiety. So it is important to find some sort of food or nutritional supplement that provides the nutrients my body requires for the tough job of physical and mental recovery. As I get further into the detox process, I find myself eating and drinking more than usual and beyond what my body needs, which can often lead to unexpected weight

gain or other body changes. Physical exercise, especially cardiovascular workouts, really helped me manage some of these changes. Thank you for taking the time to read about some of the difficulties that I had while detoxing from marijuana. These are merely my experiences, yours may differ.

Marijuana Detox: Ride it Out; It's Worth the Price of Admission

I can tell you a bit about detox from Marijuana. I've detoxed a few times now with varying intensity. For me the mildest of the detoxes usually involved night sweats, general anxiety, loss of appetite, and trouble sleeping. Symptoms peaked at around 3-5 days of sobriety and lingered for two weeks to a month. These detoxes occurred after fairly heavy marijuana use (2g-6g daily), smoking flower that maxed out at 30% THC.

My worst detoxes have all involved concentrates (shatter, wax, live resin, etc.). I found the detox from concentrates to be more severe than I would have ever imagined. At my peak usage, I was consuming around 2g daily of concentrates averaging 80%-90% THC. The two worst experiences were both when I quit cold turkey after using to this extent. I found that after about 48 hours of sobriety I could not eat some things without becoming violently ill. For example, on day three of detox I tried to eat a few slices of bread and butter in the morning and was hit with intense nausea and an upset stomach that left me sprawled out on my bathroom floor. Along with the nausea and what I would call flu-like symptoms (vomiting, diarrhea, body temperature irregularity), there was intense anxiety and a huge desire to smoke to alleviate the symptoms.

The worst of the sickness, for me, peaked at around 72 hours of sobriety. I found avoiding fats was helpful for minimizing nausea. When eating low-fat food, my body did not react as violently, and the nausea was mostly mitigated. There is good news! The symptoms do subside if you can ride them out. In my experience, at around day five symptoms settled down significantly.

I won't lie to you, these detoxes sucked pretty bad. I wish I would have avoided detoxing cold turkey from concentrates; I don't recommend it. But if you're in the same boat I was in, it will pass, and the rewards waiting for you on the other side are worth the price of admission.

About Marijuana Detox—Member Stories



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Introduction

These are some personal stories of detox written by members of Marijuana Anonymous. The purpose of this pamphlet is to carry the message of recovery to the marijuana addict who still suffers, particularly anyone who fears detox or is currently experiencing it. These stories are as unique as those who wrote them. We can't predict anyone's detox symptoms, and we suggest you refer to the About Marijuana Detox pamphlet. Here are their stories...

Even If You Don't Think You Notice a Difference, Every Day You Stay Sober Gets Better

Getting clean was a hard time for me, like really hard. I couldn't sleep. I had constant nightmares, and the nerves in my neck were always on edge. I also had strong urges to smoke all the time, and my mind felt like it was spinning a million miles a minute. It was definitely a bad show.

You could imagine my relief when I heard that I was not the only one that suffered from these things. My fellow newcomers experienced many, if not all, the symptoms I was experiencing. My sponsor chuckled and recalled how it had been exactly the same for them. Annoyed, I asked, "How long until it got better?" My sponsor told me, "It gets better every day you stay sober, even if you don't think you notice a difference." Darn, I had to stay sober now! But that was the problem: I couldn't string together more than a few weeks of sobriety at a time, and that meant starting over with my detox symptoms every time I relapsed.

After a while, I started asking a different question: How do I get sober and stay sober? That's when the solution outlined in the Steps began working for me. Focusing on the suffering from my detox symptoms didn't do me any favors. The longer I stayed sober, the better my symptoms got. One day I realized I didn't have to worry about things like getting sleep or obsessive thoughts about pot. Thanks to working the Steps, while being supported by my sponsor, I managed to string together more sobriety than ever before. It turns out I just had to turn my attention to the solution and run toward it!

Prayers Help Almost Immediately

When I first got sober, I experienced a lot of the typical physical side effects of detox. I would sweat more than normal, and I didn't have as much of an appetite. I had noticeably more unchanneled energy, and I had a hard time sleeping. Every time I became conscious of these

side effects, I would stop what I was doing and channel all of my energy and focus into reciting the First and Third Step prayers. Almost immediately, these prayers would help.

Over time, the frequency that I experienced these uncomfortable side effects diminished, until after about six to eight weeks, I didn't feel them at all. More recently, I have been noticing what I identify as the mental and spiritual side effects of detox: anxiety, nervousness, and discontent. I believe I am feeling these things more now because I am no longer numbing myself from them through the use and abuse of substances. I continue to turn to prayer for solace, and every time I humbly ask for help, my higher power provides.

I've just started Step Four with my sponsor. Through the first three Steps I have gained a stronger connection and trust in my higher power. I'm looking forward to continuing to build this trust and faith through the Steps and to cleaning house to draw myself nearer to God's will. Through this, I can already feel the psychic and spiritual change awakening in me as I transition from restless, irritable, and discontent to happy, joyous, and free.

I Just Kept Repeating the Mantra, "One Day At a Time," and After a While, I Started to Feel Better

When I first quit smoking weed, I thought there would be some discomfort and general unpleasantness. What actually happened was about two to three weeks of pure misery. I experienced major headaches, body aches, insomnia, and just a general feeling of, "I can't do this." However, since I had been getting high for over three decades, I knew I couldn't continue on that path.

I made up my mind to accept the state I was in, and knew it couldn't last forever. Over the years, I had been able to stop using pot, but always replaced the weed with alcohol or some other substance. This time I had no other drugs to ease the detox from marijuana, because I went to an outpatient program four nights a week and attended a Saturday night MA meeting.

I got a sponsor right away and listened to their suggestions. Exercising a lot helped, long hot showers helped, eating healthy helped, listening and sharing at meetings helped, and guess what... I was still pretty damn miserable for about three weeks.

I just kept repeating the mantra, "One Day at a Time." After a while, I did start to feel better. I thought to myself, "I can do this." I knew I couldn't go back and start using again. That was not an option. I had done so much damage to my mind, body, and spirit that my only hope was being in recovery.

That was over 12 years ago, and even though that period of my life was very difficult and painful, I am so grateful for it. Today, I get to live a life with hope and wonder, and experience all of life's joys and sorrows without being in any kind of drug-induced haze. It's a wonderful thing, and I highly recommend it.

If It Weren't For My Sponsor and My MA Group, It Would Have Been Too Much to Handle

At first I felt like I was in a horrible fog that wouldn't go away. That lasted about a week or two. Then the feelings came back. Emotions returned that I had been suppressing for years. If it weren't for my sponsor and my MA group, it would have been too much to handle. Once the fog lifted, I still was not able to handle my feelings well. That is where working the Steps came in. Now, years later, I give all of those problems to my higher power, and life goes much more smoothly.

Addiction Is Heavy and Demanding; Recovery Is Light and Liberating

I felt like I needed to stop using, but I was terrified of spending the rest of my life without marijuana. I got on my knees to ask whatever God there may be to help me, and I immediately felt released from the weight of craving marijuana. I wanted to keep and enhance this new freedom, so I threw myself wholeheartedly into the program: get a sponsor, read the literature, work the Steps, go to meetings, be of service. In the beginning of my sobriety, my life was such a mess that I couldn't tell the difference between the symptoms of detox and the symptoms of living in spiritual bankruptcy for so long. Rather than hearing a loud, booming voice from heaven, the solutions would appear through a chance remark made by a friend, a visit to the doctor, the discovery of a book on healing the body, or even learning to ballroom dance. Addiction is heavy and demanding. Recovery is light and liberating.

Detoxing from Marijuana

Unfortunately, I have had the experience of detoxing from marijuana many times. I was a tough case with an extremely hard head, so it takes me a long time to learn even the simplest of lessons. I can speak with confidence on what my separation from the use of marijuana experiences have been. One constant withdrawal symptom I experience is difficulty sleeping. I have tried many methods to manage this symptom ranging from other addictive behaviors to more holistic/spiritual solutions. The first thing I do to

The Prodromal Stage

I was a thirty-year weed user. I used small doses every day. During the last several years, I would have episodes of extreme stomach pain without vomiting. I could then only eat a limited diet (white, bland food) and felt fatigued for days. Hot baths and showers helped. *I would smoke more weed during the episodes because I thought it would help.* I went to many doctors and tried many diets, with no explanation or help. After stopping weed, I have not had any new episodes. My doctor thinks it might have been CHS in the “prodromal” stage, where there is no vomiting. I am so thankful for my sobriety. I had no idea how much the weed was hurting my body and mind until I found the gift of Marijuana Anonymous to support my sobriety.

Insane and Unmanageable

While I tried pot in my sophomore year of high school, I didn’t develop a real dependency until I was eighteen. When I was 21, daily smoking caused me to have psychosis and after being hospitalized, I stopped using pot briefly. It took me six months after that to get back to smoking daily, and in a year I started experiencing symptoms of CHS. Six months after the first symptoms of nausea, I had been in and out of ERs for a few months and smoked an insane amount of pot daily thinking that it was helping me.

I blamed the medical staff for being incompetent and not being able to find out what was happening with me, while I was told right away I was sick because of smoking so much marijuana. I told the medical staff right to their faces they were insane! *And who was really the insane one?* I fell into a dark pit of self-pity and despair. Waking up at five am, every day and throwing up became my regular routine and I was miserable. I couldn’t work.

The second time I had CHS was in 2022, something extremely traumatic happened, and I couldn’t deal with reality. I smoked so much, I was back to the routine of waking up at four am, being sick till I couldn’t throw up anymore, and not eating or drinking anything. I lost more than 30 pounds and had to get IV fluids in the hospitals weekly, rejecting doctors’ suggestions to stop smoking pot. I only learned that one could die of CHS when I talked about my experiences with my first sponsor.

I am grateful for my Higher Power, for finding Marijuana Anonymous, working the first step and realizing how insane and unmanageable this addiction is for me.

Inherently Valuable

I awoke in a cold sweat, my heart palpitating, my body shaking. I ran into the bathroom and began profusely vomiting. Thus began the 18 days I spent in and out of the hospital; in and out of the bathroom every fifteen minutes; in and out of consciousness and sanity. For two years, I suffered from CHS. Doctors upon doctors told me to stop smoking pot, and yet I couldn’t. Until one final day, the hospital told me I was reaching fatality. That day, I realized the extent to which cannabis controlled my life. Previously, when I had attempted to get sober, I never believed I was worth recovery, worth experiencing the joys that everyone else experienced. *The day I realized I had value changed my life.*

Since getting sober, I have not had a single vomiting episode. I have not had a single day where I’ve fought for someone else’s jubilation more than my own. I have not had a single day where I’ve believed the subdued nature cannabis induces is worth sacrificing the joys that everyday life can bring you. From my therapist, I have learned to ride the wave, and that any decision made in the moment can have repercussions that will last a lifetime. From my family, I have learned unconditional affection and unconditional love for the experience of life. From myself, I have learned that I am inherently valuable, I am deserving of joy. From MA, I have learned to choose a life in which I prioritize the well-being that I, for so long, decided was not worth it.

And so, I live to tell you that you are worth it. You are worth fighting for. You have value. And you are more than what cannabis does to you.

Note: CHS and detoxing is different for everyone. We are not medical professionals. This pamphlet should not be construed as medical advice. Please talk to a health professional and advocate for yourself if you think you have symptoms relating to CHS.

Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS)— Member Stories



MARIJUANA ANONYMOUS

A Twelve Step Program of Recovery
for Marijuana Addicts

Marijuana Anonymous World Services

5551 Hollywood Blvd. #1043

Hollywood, California 90028-6814

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MA12.org or Marijuana-Anonymous.org
Support@MA12.org

Introduction

These are some personal stories of Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS) written by members of Marijuana Anonymous. These stories are as unique as those who wrote them. We can't predict anyone's CHS or detox symptoms—not everyone who uses marijuana/cannabis will develop CHS. We suggest you refer to the pamphlet "About Marijuana Detox" for more information. May the shared experience, strength, and hope below help you to know that you are not alone and recovery is possible.

We Are Not Alone

It was hard to surrender to the fact that I had developed CHS within a few months of marijuana becoming legal in New York state. It wasn't until I got very sick on a plane traveling for vacation—vomiting nonstop, for the third time in four months, that I thought my increased marijuana use may be an issue. I spent that entire vacation in bed getting sick throughout the day, unable to eat and could barely drink water. This would happen in cycles. I had lost over twenty pounds in four months from vomiting, being severely nauseous and unable to eat anything other than soup and protein smoothies.

My primary medical doctor ordered me to go to a gastroenterologist (GI) doctor who ordered tests to be done and the results showed gastritis. The GI doctor, who I was open with about my marijuana use, told me they believed I had CHS which caused gastritis. *I am so grateful they even knew about it, as so many people seem to be unaware of it.* It gave me the push I needed towards even better recovery.

It has taken me over two years into the MA program to fully surrender and admit I am powerless over marijuana, and that my life has become unmanageable. By around ninety days my CHS symptoms had diminished. I'll never forget the terrible cycles and first twenty days of detox with the rough emotions. Finding MA and the wonderful fellowship has forever changed my life for the better. I am not alone.

Before Medicine Knew

I had been a chronic pot smoker for ten years before I had two major flare ups of CHS, both of which required hospitalization. The first time I went to the emergency room, I was in extreme pain. They put me on a morphine drip for a week. It was the year 2000, before medicine knew what CHS was. They said it resembled ulcerative colitis, so that's what they treated me for.

The second time, I treated myself with warm baths, and pot! The only things that I thought were making the symptoms better. By the time I got to the emergency room, it wasn't just pain, it was all colors coming out of every orifice—green, yellow, blood. I was projectile vomiting in the waiting room.

Years later, I went to see a younger GI doctor, and felt comfortable confiding in them that I was smoking pot every day. They are the one who said, "I think you actually have CHS." *I had thought pot was one of the only things that was making it better, but in reality, pot was my allergy and was making it worse.* My addiction was so strong that even after the doctor told me this, it would be years before I would quit using. It hasn't always been easy, but now I have eight and a half years sober, thanks to this program.

A Relief To Know

I started using at sixteen years old. Ten years of daily use left me emotionally and spiritually drained. In my mid-twenties, I started losing weight. At first, a few pounds, then a few more. Eventually, I was unable to eat a full meal, and began vomiting after I put anything in my body. I continued smoking daily.

I woke up on August 21, 2022 with a massive pit in my stomach. An undeniable feeling that I needed help. It felt like the end, like I was giving up on my life. Little did I know, this was a new beginning. I spent that morning in a hospital bed, with an IV in my arm. The nurse was familiar with the detox symptoms. Fatigue, nausea, confusion, anxiety and more. The IV fluids made me feel human again. I explained to the nurse the nature of my smoking. Every day, all day, for ten years. With confidence, they told me that I would end up right back here if I kept it up. They explained my condition as CHS. It was a relief to know there was an answer. On the other hand, *I knew it was going to take all of my willpower to stay clean.*

I found a virtual IOP (intensive outpatient program) focused on substance abuse. I learned about my addiction and started sharing openly. In those meetings, I heard about MA. I started attending meetings, found a sponsor, and started being of service. Now, when I feel my sanity or peace leaving me, I check to see if I've been doing these five things: (1) go to meetings, (2) find a sponsor, (3) work the Steps, (4) connect with a Higher Power, and (5) work with others. Keep the faith, it works if you work it. So work it cause you're worth it!

Surrounded By Puzzled Doctors

The first time everything started with a strong nausea after lunch, that in the following couple of hours developed into intense vomiting, cold sweats, and shivers. Something was very wrong, I never felt that way before. I called the emergency number.

The paramedics got an ambulance and I spent the night at the hospital, surrounded by puzzled doctors who asked me more than once if I had been drinking. Eventually, the diagnosis was food intoxication. The day after I got back to my normal life: smoking all day every day, desperately trying to control it. Until it happened again, and again, and again within a few months. Hours in the hospital, antispasitics, and sedatives would not stop the stomach from flipping inside out every ten minutes. Doctors still puzzled, exams all negative.

The last time it happened I was close to kidney failure: muscle fibers breaking down from the abdominal spasms which started interfering with kidney functions. Finally, a doctor asked me what I didn't want to bring up myself: "Do you do drugs?" "No, I mean, yes, I smoke some weed, sometimes." They said, "I think you are alright, you just have to change your lifestyle." A google search did the rest. All my symptoms were there: Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome.

I went on smoking for months. I couldn't stop despite being aware that this could kill me. Eventually, I found the community and the principles of MA and, day after day, the freedom of sobriety. *Now I look back and feel grateful for what I went through.* Experiencing CHS is what brought me to MA and helped me to find the courage to start a transformative change.

The Serenity Prayer

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.*

Sayings to Remember

- One Day at a Time
- Progress, Not Perfection
- Let Go, Let God
- Turn it Over
- Live and Let Live
- H.A.L.T.
- Expect a Miracle
- Don't Quit Before the Miracle Happens
- Easy Does It

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*There are times, in all of our lives,
when “life on life’s terms”
just seems to be too much.
These are a few suggestions
that may help to put balance and
serenity back into your life.*

- Say the Serenity Prayer
- Call your sponsor
- Pray and meditate
- Call someone in the program
- Go to a meeting
- Read program literature
- Write about the problem
- Work with others
- Remove yourself from the situation
- Work the Steps

*The program works
if you work it!*

“Talk before you take!”

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