

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.

Cannabis Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS)— Member Stories



MARIJUANA ANONYMOUS

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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.