

Time for a 'Weed-Free January?' How cannabis users could benefit from a 'dry' month

January 11 2024, by James MacKillop



Credit: RDNE Stock project from Pexels

By now, most are familiar with the idea of Dry January, a voluntary month without alcohol that follows a month when many drink more than

usual.

The idea of [Dry January](#) started in the United Kingdom in 2012 and has become popular internationally since then. The point is to use a date on the calendar that traditionally prompts resolutions to encourage drinkers to make a month-long commitment to giving their bodies a break and resetting their attitudes and habits in a healthier way for the rest of the year and possibly beyond.

For those who use cannabis, the idea of taking a month off is also worth considering, whether it's January or not.

1 in 4 use cannabis

Canadians are among the world's biggest consumers of cannabis, especially since [it was legalized](#) in 2018. Prior to legalization, about 15 percent of adults used cannabis once a year or more. Today, about [one in four](#) adult Canadians use cannabis once a year or more, with a higher concentration among young adults.

Frequency of use varies widely, but there is a sizable group of people who are daily or near-daily users—[about 25 percent](#). Within that group, nearly three-quarters report [impaired control over their cannabis use](#), a key feature of [cannabis use disorder](#), the medical definition of cannabis addiction.

Though daily use and [cannabis use](#) disorder are not identical, daily use is nonetheless a reasonable way to identify people who are more likely to experience [negative consequences](#) and might benefit from taking a break.

Beyond frequency, the amount of cannabis one uses and the concentration of [THC, the psychoactive component of cannabis](#), are

important considerations in the likelihood of experiencing harms. Many of the risks and harms from cannabis scale to the amount of THC consumed, so it's not just a matter of consuming less frequently.

The benefits of a weed-free month

A Weed-Free January could do more good than cannabis users may realize. Any month will do, of course, but January is traditionally a time for resolutions and fresh starts, so it may be the most natural time to cut out weed.

Based on the existing evidence, regular cannabis users could expect to experience a number of positive physical and lifestyle changes from a 31-day pause.

Among them:

- Resetting one's tolerance for cannabis. In response to cannabis use, the body's [endocannabinoid system](#) adapts over time, causing users to develop tolerance. Indeed, for heavy users, unpleasant symptoms of withdrawal also follow these adaptations, although cannabis withdrawal is not life-threatening like alcohol withdrawal. Users could expect that taking a month off would be enough for the body to revert to its natural set-points.
- Clearing the mental cobwebs. Cannabis use is associated with [reduced cognitive functioning](#), especially [heavy persistent use](#). Even short breaks from cannabis have been found to [reduce cognitive consequences](#), and a month of abstinence has been shown to return cognitive functioning to the level of [non-cannabis users](#).
- Giving your lungs a break. It's well established that inhaling combusted cannabis smoke is bad for the lungs [in a number of ways](#), which may be one of the reasons cannabis has been linked

to [heart attack and stroke risk](#).

- Developing other habits and routines that take advantage of a clearer mind, such as sports, reading and sober socializing. A rich repertoire of activities without substance use is an important lifestyle counterbalance.
- Saving money. Cannabis is not cheap and adds up quickly if you consume daily. A Weed-Free January could save hundreds of dollars.
- Taking stock of whether you may have a problem. Cannabis use disorder is real and can have serious consequences. A weed-free month can provide a chance to do a self-check and see how hard it is to stop. If quitting for a month is impossible (or feels like torture), it may be time to talk to a health professional. [Effective treatments do exist for cannabis use disorder](#).

Importantly, many people have authorizations to use medical cannabis to manage a variety of conditions and this is not to suggest that those individuals should abruptly stop for a month, just as it would be foolhardy to recommend an annual abstinence from cholesterol, blood-pressure, or other medications. For [medical cannabis](#) patients who think it might be beneficial to take a break, a chat with their authorizing physician or family doctor would be in order.

Bottom line, though, if you use recreational [cannabis](#) regularly, especially daily, having a Weed-Free January could be both good for your health and a good way to promote other healthy resolutions. A real win-win.

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