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T-Break Guide™



T-Break Guide

A guide to help support you on a
cannabis tolerance break



Hello. An Introduction



If you smoke weed, at some point, you should take a tolerance break. Like anything else, your body builds up a tolerance to weed: you need more to get high. A T-Break could help you save money and also keep balance.

The hard news is that if you smoke weed most days, a true T-Break should be at least 21 days long. For those who regularly partake, it takes around three weeks or more for THC to fully leave your system. (That's because THC bonds to fat, which is stored in the body longer.)

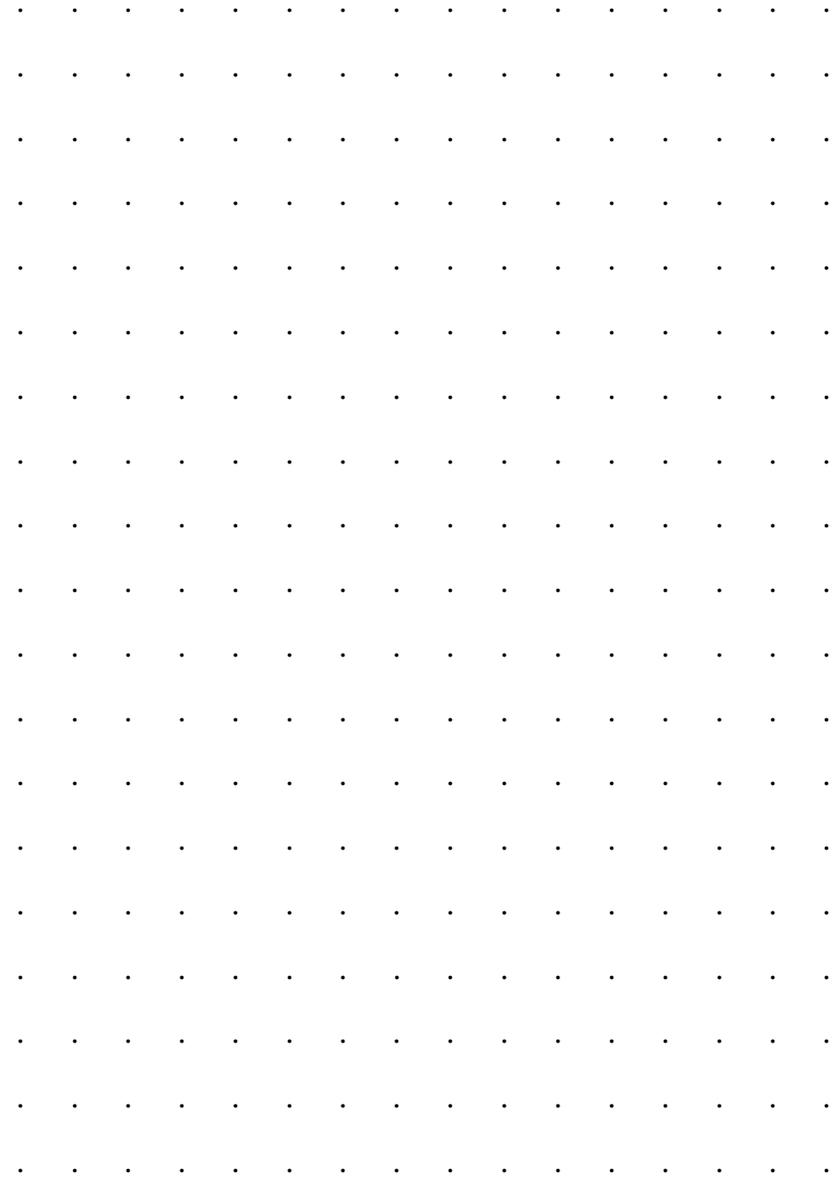
I created this guide because people would tell me that when they set out to take a T-Break, they only lasted a few days. Sometimes they felt ashamed because it was harder than they thought. There is no need to feel bad...

...but it can be hard to take a break. People usually find some aspect of getting high beneficial. Weed causes fewer harms than some other drugs and creates less cravings. For those very reasons, ironically, some people find it challenging to find a balance with their weed use: they might think that weed has *no* harms and *no* cravings. Everything has pros and cons. And weed, like a lot of things, can create dependency.

A T-Break is a good time to re-evaluate balance. If you want to stop completely, just continue the T-Break. Others may return to weed and can use this as a support while bringing down their tolerance and finding better balance.

Either way, a little support is a good thing. I hope you find it useful. If you don't find this helpful- I would welcome your feedback.

With respect,
~Tom Fontana
tom.fontana@uvm.edu





How to use this guide

This guide has daily practices. Each week has a different theme:

- Week 1- physical
- Week 2 - emotional
- Week 3 - spiritual / existential

It may be useful to read a few a days at once because there are practical things about sleep and appetite that may be helpful right away. Care has been put into the content and order, but you know what works best for you.

There is a calendar in the back that you can use to check-off the days. Plus, there are blank pages for your thoughts, drawings, etc. Feel free to make this is a choose-your-own adventure guide.



A large grid of 20 rows and 20 columns of small dots, intended for daily practices or journaling.





Day 1 – Stay Busy

“The first days are the hardest days”

~Grateful Dead

Some people can go from always being high and into a T-Break with no issues. The rest of us humans will experience some readjustment and discomfort: perhaps appetite, sleep, anxiety, irritability, etc. This guide can help and support you. Together, we’ll address each of these things.

The hardest moments will be the times of day when you usually partake. That’s when your brain and body expects it. You’ll get through it. But it helps to be busy.

Perhaps you’ve been wanting to workout or meditate more. Perhaps there is a show you’ve been looking to watch or a podcast you haven’t had the time for. Maybe there is a hobby you’ve been wanting to get better at. Now’s the time. Move, watch, learn, practice...whatever. Do something.

Consider having things to do that you can invite friends to. If someone invites you to smoke, invite them to a movie. It is a good idea to have things planned to do with friends. It is also a good idea to have things planned for when you are by yourself.





Day 2 – Sleep

“Now I lay me down to sleep...”

~A bedtime prayer (also, Metallica)

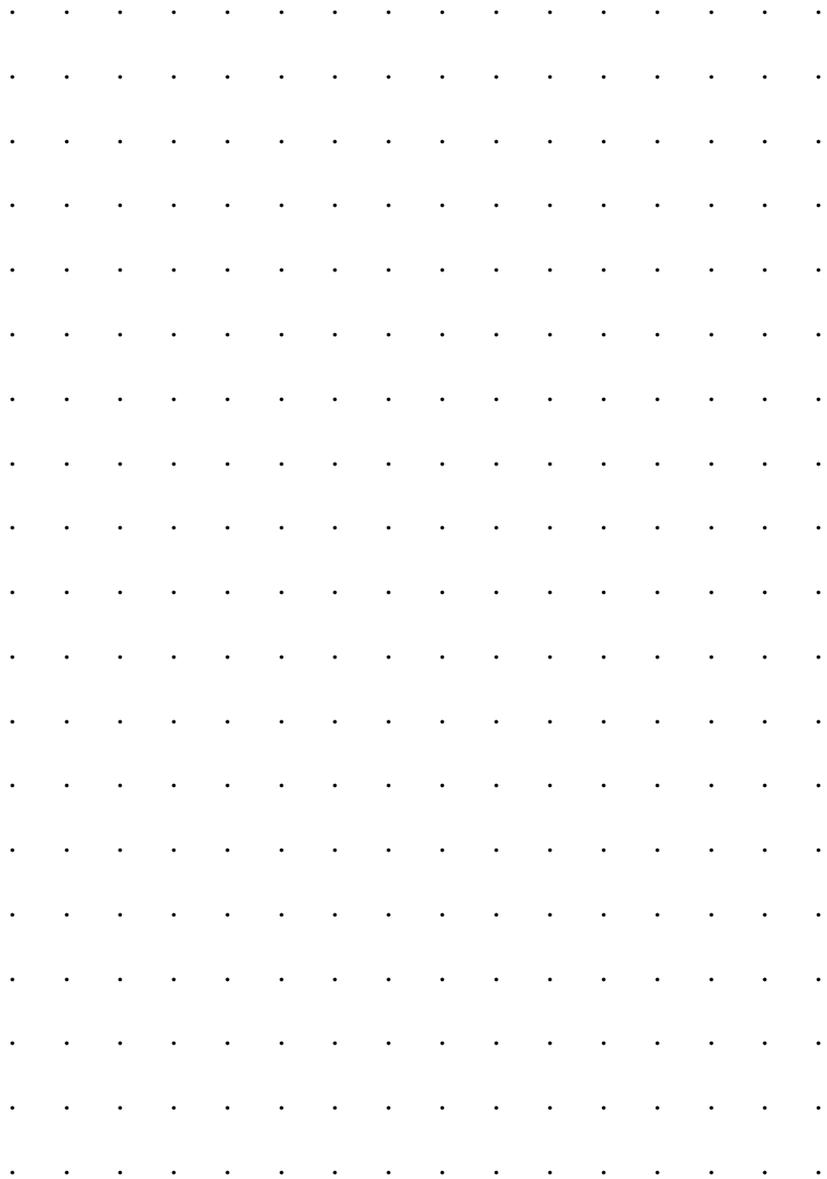
Lots of people who partake daily do so before bed. THC in your system during sleep impacts your sleep cycle. (More on that later). On the upside, being high before bed helps people fall asleep. Unfortunately, some people come to have difficulty falling asleep without it.

This T-Break offers a chance to create new routines. “Bedtime” is a concept that you probably haven’t thought about in years. But falling asleep is as much about your bedtime routine as it is about being tired.

The quote above is mostly because I wanted to reference Metallica. But *also* because it may conjure some old-timey notion of a kid going to bed. Kids tend to sleep well when they have routine. Pajamas, bath, books, and bed. The whole sequence is designed to tell the body that it is time to sleep.

If you are having trouble falling asleep, look at your routine. If you don’t have a bedtime routine, make one. Here are a few tips. Wear pajamas: fancy footy ones, or some just old comfy clothes. Do something involving hot water: a bath, shower, face-wash or cup of herbal tea. Use the blue-light lifter on your screen. (The blue light is a simulant.) And turn off devices 30 minutes prior.

Sleep experts say that your bed should be used only for sex and sleep. In college, especially in a dorm, your bed often becomes your table, your desk, and your couch. Dorms are rough; forced triples are ridiculous. If sleep remains an issue, consider how you use your bed. It might help to stay off your bed until it is time to sleep.





Thank You

This guide would not be possible without the insight, editing, and support of so many people. Most especially, the students who have shared their stories and advice:

BC, KP, BD, SL, MB, MK, AT, MW, SK, JS, CH, CS, AW, BP, EP, BL, AC, GI, GO, RJ, JF

Special editing thanks to Kaisy Wheeler- you have a gift. (And you hate when I start a sentence with 'and')

Thank you to colleagues in the field, who have been generous in spirit and mind: Amelia Arria, Brian Bowden, Diane Fedorchak, Peter Jackson, Jason Kilmer, Nancy Reynolds, Peter Rives

The idea for this format came from the Student Well-Being Center at Notre Dame. Thanks ND.

And thank you to the University of Vermont and to my co-workers in LivingWell for supporting this work. Y'all are kick ass awesome.

Day 3 – Food

“If you want a quality, act as if you already had it”

~William James

Some people experience a lack of appetite when they cut back on weed. This is more likely if you got high before meals. Weed tends to simulate appetite. When used regularly, your appetite may have become dependent on weed to get it simulated. Here are a few tips....

Act *as if* you are hungry and eat on a schedule. (Acting “as if” is a concept from Adlerian psychology- poached by Cognitive Behavior Therapy- and it is widely used. It’s the idea of ‘fake it till you make it’. You act *as if* something is true, until it becomes true. The fact that this works shows the power of confidence...and that confidence can be created.)

Try not to skip meals. Eat at regular times and in regular amounts. But definitely don’t beat yourself up about not finishing something. (Eating something is better than nothing.)

Even though you may not feel hungry, your body still needs the food. If you don’t eat, you will feel more tired, irritable, and anxious. So, act as if you are hungry. Your appetite will return.





Day 4 – Anxiety / Boredom

“The things you own, end up owning you”
~Fight Club

Week 2 is focused on the emotional side: we will go over anxiety, boredom, and irritability. But it is worth introducing them now.

It is hard to make a change. Maybe weed was a big part of your life. Maybe not. Either way, it did something for you. Perhaps it helped you feel less anxious or less bored. When taking a T-Break, many people initially may feel more bored, more anxious, or more irritable. These things can be especially true if you are not eating and sleeping well the first couple of days.

These first days are hard. Actually, some people call this- day 4- the hardest. Some people quit by this point. Don't. It will start getting easier. Until it does, try these things:

- Busy your body: workout, run, bike, hike, climb, do pushups
- Busy your mind: create, draw, make music, write, read, listen to music loud
- Quiet your mind and body: meditate (try 'mindfulnessum' on SoundCloud)
- Connect: to that campus club you never went to, or to an old friend

Day 21 – Celebrate

*“You who see,
go tell the others”*
~Audre Lorde

Congrats. You've taken a full T-Break!

Give yourself some credit for doing this. (Like...not too much credit: you took a tolerance break- you didn't save the whales.) For real though- it is not easy to do. Well done.

I hope this guide was a help to you. Please consider giving feedback:

- if the guide helped, then I would love to hear from you. Tell me what worked
- if this guide was a shank, honestly, I'd love to hear from you even more. Let me know what bombed. We can make this better.

Like most things, maybe it was a mix of both.
Let me know your experience: tfontana@uvm.edu

Thank you.

Be well,
~Tom Fontana





Day 20 – What Next?

“Tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today”

~Malcolm X

Almost there.

Each day has been a theme about what might come up during your T-Break. We moved from the immediate to the future. We went from problems to possibilities.

How'd it go? Were there themes in this guide that helped?
Others themes that fell flat?

As a recap, take some time to think about how this process went for you. Revisit themes that might have been a hit or miss. Are they still?

What next?

What was your original purpose?

- If it was to just reduce your tolerance... you've done it.
- If it was to see if you could do it...you've done it.
- If it was to see how you felt without THC- well...how do you feel?

(If it was to get clean for a pee-test...you are likely good, but if you were a heavy daily partaker- you might need 5 weeks to be completely safe. The exact science still eludes us.)

If you plan on returning to weed, know that you have the skills to take a successful break at any time. If you plan on keeping this break going, this guide may be ending, but you certainly have the skills to proceed.

Day 5 – Sleep II

“Sleep is the best meditation”

~Dalai Lama

We sleep in stages with 90 minute cycles. REM sleep- when we dream- is a light stage. Deep sleep is physically restorative; REM sleep is mentally restorative.

THC, like alcohol, brings people to deep stage sleep quicker. That is why people feel like weed helps them fall asleep. But THC holds people in deep sleep all night. Physically, this is fairly restorative. The problem is that THC disrupts REM sleep. Since THC holds people in deep stage sleep, and REM happens in light stage, this creates REM disruption.

If you smoke nightly, you go into REM rebound: you dream early and inefficiently. Many people who get high before bed think that they do not dream. When first taking a T-Break, you may experience dreams returning vividly: that's you coming out of REM disruption. It will settle soon.

If you are a student, REM disruption likely impacts your academics. However, most students don't see the connection. A national survey asks students to name the top 25 things that impact their academic success. Alcohol is 20; weed is 25. Clearly, they don't view weed having much negative impact. And yet, the connection is there...

What students list as the top three impacts are 1) stress, 2) anxiety, 3) being tired. Interestingly, the top 3 effects of REM deprivation caused by THC are 1) irritability, 2) anxiety, 3) daytime sleepiness. The same things.

People often describe feeling less “cloudy” when they take a break. That is due to better sleep and REM. Perhaps you are feeling these positive effects too.





Day 6 – Routine

“Success doesn’t come to you...you go to it”
~Marva Collins

There is a difference between *getting high* and *being high*. Being high is what you experience *after* you partake. It is personal.

Getting high is the experience *before and as* you partake. It is social. It takes time. People develop their own routines and preferences. Techniques can turn into art forms, and people begin to feel like masters of their craft. Since we all need to feel mastery, this can be hard to give up.

Plus, for some people, weed becomes an identity- their brand. They might be the ‘connoisseur’ who learns every stain. Or that guy who takes the biggest mole rips. Or the person who rolls the best joints. This is all kinda silly...but kinda real.

If you really enjoy partaking, it is ok to be good at it. But when you list the things that you are best at in life, weed probably shouldn’t be in your top 3.

We get good and what we practice. When you get high, you spend your time on that and not other things.

With the time and perspective you have while taking a break, consider what patterns are worth returning to- and what is worth leaving behind.

On Day 1, “stay busy” might have been an exercise in avoidance: time was an enemy. Moving forward, try to see that extra time and energy as an opportunity, an investment that you now get to make in something important to you.



Day 19 – Connecting Down

*“I don’t care about anyone not liking me,
you bitches barely like yourselves”*
~Cardi B

Yesterday’s theme of connecting up was a bit metaphysical. Today’s is more grounded.

We need connection to the people around us. This is about connecting down thought the earth and connecting with others. Those connections are roots that anchor us and secure us in a storm. They are connections to the people who are there for us when we need them.

Weed is one way to make connections to other people. But how do you know the difference between true friends and weed friends?

If those connections grow beyond weed and become grounded in something deeper, than those are true friends. If those connections do not grow past the weed, then those are weed friends.

Take a look at your friendships. Consider how you spend your time together. If you do lots of things together- talk about lots of things, and just sometimes get high together... those are likely real friends. However, if you mostly get high together- talk about how high you are right now, the last time you were this high, and plan the next time you’ll get high...those are weed friends.

This T-Break should give you some sense of who is truly there for you. Use that info.





Day 18 – Connecting Up

*“Gonna keep on trying
till I reach my highest ground”
~Stevie Wonder*

Infinity exists in multiple directions. There is the infinitely large, and the infinitely small. An infinity above, and an infinity below.

Below us is the earth. Our roots stretch out, anchor us, reach and connect us to the others around us. Above us is the sky. Our hearts and minds can reach up and connect us to an infinity above.

Do you believe in that infinity?

(Forgive me if not. Many folks believe in some version that infinity: the energy around us, God, or spirits. I am not assuming that because you smoke weed and were interested in a T-Break, that what you really wanted is a guide to enlightenment. But it is worth addressing here since there is a power to connecting to something greater than yourself.)

This theme isn't so much about weed. It is more about you and the connection to something inside, above, and all around you. Your connection to this infinity is well worth contemplating:

- When do you feel most connected?
- Is there space in your life for quiet and reflection
- What activities and relationships support you in this?



Day 7 – Celebrate

*“Treat yo’self”
~Parks and Rec*

Week 1 complete!

You have accomplished what most people consider the hardest part. Many people feel like it gets easier from here. Well done!

As we addressed yesterday, getting high requires time. It also takes money. Consider the money you've saved not smoking this week. It is now time to spend it: treat yo'self.

If you go on after this not smoking, you can save that money for something big. But for this T-Break...spend it.

What are you going to spend it on? Music, movies, food (now that your appetite is back?!) Maybe treat yourself to fancy pajamas, since you've got a new bedtime routine. Whatever. It's your call.

Try to reflect. If it is your style, in the space below (and there is more in back) draw or write about your experience this past week





Day 8 – Withdrawal

“Sometimes when I’m high, I feel high in reverse”

~Juice WRLD

In general, the withdrawal effects from a substance are the opposite of the effects that the substance creates. For example: caffeine stimulates the brain... so withdrawal creates headaches. This is also true for the side-effects. A side-effect of opiates is constipation... withdrawal involves pooping (a lot).

Consider what it feels like when you are high. If being high makes you feel more relaxed, then right now you might now feel a bit more jumpy or irritable. If being high felt calming, you might now feel more anxious. And, if as a side-effect, being high helped you feel more connected to people, you might now be feeling more lonely. This week, we are going to look at these.

One other things to note: there seems to something cumulative about weed. We know that it builds up in the system. Anecdotally- and this is not from research, but from many conversations over the years- there seems to be a point at which weed stops working in some people. There can be a point when they report getting high in reverse.

For these people, something seems to change after or around 2-3 years of heavy use. On rare occasion, people report hyperemesis syndrome (extreme stomach pain cause by THC). More often, people just say that “something changed”. Weed begins to have less and less impact, then none. Then they report feeling anxious when they get high, even when that never happened before.

With increased THC concentrations, this is just something to keep in mind. It invites partaking in moderation. It certainly suggests that a true tolerance break (like you are doing now) is a good thing.

Day 17 – Escape

“Any time someone gives you drugs, the purpose is to subdue. Always.

Whether it is from a dealer, a friend, your mother or your government”

~Northern Adams

I’ll never forget this particular conversation that I had with a student. She talked about why she loved being high: it allowed her to escape into the dream version of her life, which her real life was so far from. As a child of immigrants who sacrificed so much, she felt an obligation to fulfill their dreams for her life. Getting high was her escape from their life path that she felt stuck on.

I could see the pressure of her situation and had no problem understanding why anyone would want weed’s escape. Then she shared her conflict: she was starting to feel like weed’s temporary relief made her current path just bearable enough so that she was avoiding the harder path, which could lead to the actual dreams she had for herself.

Boredom and anxiety can be instructive. Sometimes it may be our mind calling us to notice that something is off in our lives. Yet, there are so many sources of pain and trauma that for some people, any additional feelings are too much to bear. It is understandable that people want relief. However, there is a different between relief and self-medication. It is in the timing.

If life has made someone walk across hot coals, let’s not judge them for using medication afterwards to tend to their wounded feet. But if someone is still standing on the hot coals, the misuse of medication will decrease their ability to find a way off.

I’m not suggesting that your life- or your feet- are on fire, but for some people, this is real. No judgement from this end, but consider the degree to which weed use (or any drug or behavior) is aiding you in the pursuit of your dreams, or subduing you with false escape.





Day 16 – Connecting In

*“Knowing others is wisdom;
Knowing yourself is enlightenment”*
~Lao Tzu

This is trigger warning for all you cynical folks out there: I’m about to say some things that may be affirming.

As a counselor, I’ve talked with hundreds of people. The more I do so, the more I come to respect people. We all make mistakes. (In fact, some of us do a lot of dumb things.) But it is rare to find a person motivated by evil. Hearing people’s stories is hearing people’s struggle and strength.

You should know your own story. You should see your strengths and struggles. Yet many of us are more disconnected from ourselves than is healthy. That is no accident: there are systems in this world designed to create disconnection. (Patriarchy, Supremacy, Poverty, etc)

However, it is on you to reconnect and fight those systems.

Some people see substance use as a way to escape these systems. Some substances whisper escape; others scream it. At first, with moderation, drugs can be an escape. But *misuse* is always a trap. Misuse recreates the systems and cycles that disconnect people from themselves and others. Avoid misuse. Do the work of discovering yourself. You are worth it.

Day 9 – Irritability

*“But I’m aggravated without it
My saddest days are without it
My Saturdays are the loudest
I’m blowing strong”*
~J Cole

Since starting this T-Break, you might have experienced disruption to your sleep, or to your appetite, or to your mood. One of these things alone would make someone irritable. But perhaps you’ve experience a few or ALL of them. You may be feeling more irritable.

It is not comfortable, but it is OK. If irritability is not gone already, it will likely be gone soon. Go easy on yourself. (If you’ve been a jerk to friends, you can apologize). But you’re good. You’ve got this.

And remember... not everyone experiences the same things. If some of the themes in this guide do not apply to you, feel free to take anything that works and leave what does not.





Day 10 – Anxiety

*“My attraction to drugs is based on immense desire
to annihilate awareness”*

~Anais Nin

Anxiety sucks. Weed seems to help with it. In fact, research is starting to tell us more about how. Unfortunately, research also seems to show that when people use weed before their brain is done developing (≈age 27), it seems to worsen anxiety and depression in the long run.

When people start using weed regularly, they become more sensitive to feeling anxiety when they are not high. The same amount of anxiety that they once handled now feels overwhelming. They are then more likely to get high again to deal with it. This is totally understandable. It just tends to make things worse in the long run.

It can be hard to sort out the extent to which weed helps with anxiety, and the extent to which weed worsens it. This is further complicated by withdrawal. For example, say someone sets out to take a one week tolerance break. Say they get really anxious and around day three and they start smoking again. They might see that as proof that weed helps with anxiety: “when I stopped smoking weed, I felt really anxious; but when I started smoking again, I felt better. Weed cured my anxiety.” But anxiety itself is a withdrawal symptom from weed. What they demonstrated is dependency.

It is worth considering all this for yourself. It may be that weed is totally helping; it is possible that it is hurting. Most likely, however, it is a bit of both. Figuring out this mix in your life will help you find and maintain balance.

Day 15 – Outsourcing

*“Avoid using cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs
as alternatives to being an interesting person”*

~Marilyn vos Savant

Have you ever heard someone talk about alcohol as ‘personality in a bottle’? Or say that they are more funny, or better at flirting or dancing when they drink? That’s outsourcing. We are attributing the positive effect that we feel inside to something outside of us. With weed, it is less common, but still happens plenty.

We act like it is the alcohol that knows the jokes, or the dance moves. As if a substance miraculously grants us previously absent skills. That’s not what happens.

When someone describes a substance as making them feel “whole”, “loved” and “comfortable in my skin”- those are flags for addiction. It does not mean they are guaranteed to have a problem, but as humans, if that’s the only time they feel good, they are going to want to do it all the time.

In a less intense way, when someone feels like a substance makes them a better version of themselves, (insert ‘happy’, ‘relaxed’, ‘funnier’, etc, here) then they are likely to want to use that drug for those reasons. It is a sign to pay attention.

The problem with outsourcing is that the drug gets all the credit. We end up thinking that alcohol made us funny, or weed made us insightful. We think that we are better off altered and it diminishes our self-worth.

But those are your jokes and your dance moves. The substance just gave you an excuse (and therefore, confidence) to try them. You deserve the credit. Own what you deserve and stop outsourcing.





Day 14 – Celebrate

*“Save dat money”
~Lil Dicky*

Week 2 complete!

Time to celebrate. There will be a time for the sage advice of Lil Dicky to save. But for now... spend it.

Maybe you want to cook a meal for friends and play them a track of your new mix tape that your creativity and hustle produced. Maybe you just want to celebrate alone. That’s fine. (Alone is not the same as loneliness. Alone can be wonderful; loneliness is what sucks. Appreciating being alone is usually a good sign.)

It’s up to you. Enjoy

Reflect. If it is your style, in the space below (and there is more in back) draw or write about your experience this past week



Day 11 – Boredom

*“There are no boring things, just boring people”
~your grandma*

Damn... Grandma was harsh when she said that. And wrong. There are definitely a lot of boring things out there. And weed can help make boring more fun. It’s worth understanding how.

Being high makes boring more interesting by lowering your sense of what is interesting. This is similar to food. Food often tastes better when people are high, but we act as if getting high changes the chemical structure of food. We act as if we’re the same, and the food has changed; and as if we’re the same and the boring thing is more fun. But things haven’t changed: you’re just high.

On any single occasion, this distinction doesn’t really matter: if it tastes better, that’s great; if it is less boring, that’s fun. But as getting high become the solution to boredom, we become less skilled at dealing with it in other ways. It becomes harder to tolerate the regular routine.

If you return to getting high after this break, you might occasionally devour a meal high or find a not so funny movie hysterical. Enjoy it, but steer away from using weed as a cure to boredom.





Day 12 – Loneliness

“It’s the loneliness that’s a killer”

~Henry Samuel / Seal

Irritability, anxiety and boredom all have a complicated interplay with weed: it can help reduce these in the short term, but makes them worse in the long term.

Loneliness is not connected in the same way. Weed does not directly cause or cure it. But I wanted to address loneliness here because it is so real for so many of us. Indirectly, weed may have helped keep loneliness away. During this T-Break, especially at this point with the noise of irritability diminished, perhaps you are feeling loneliness creeping.

Loneliness is a hard feeling to describe. It’s connected to depression, but not the same thing. If anxiety is the fear of exposure and that we might be seen and judged...then loneliness is the fear that *no one* will see who we really are, and that no one would want to.

Weed often helps people bond. Mostly we feel good about this. But occasionally, we start to question if anyone really knows us or if anyone cares. Some of that may be paranoia from weed- you may just have been too high. But some of that is doubting the authenticity of those connections. We’ll talk about ‘connection’ in Week 3, but the feeling is real. And sucks.

You are not alone. Not everything is fake. But like anyone, you could probably stand to strengthen and deepen your connections a bit more. Now, during this T-Break, is a great time. Your authenticity (in your beauty and flaws) is what makes you real others. That’s the heart of connection and the antidote to loneliness.



Day 13 – Creativity

“Write drunk, edit sober”

~Hemingway (though, probably not)

The quote above is attributed to the late great writer, Ernest Hemingway. He probably never said it, but it’s a great line. Interestingly, it did not apply to him. Although Hemingway was known to enjoy a drink, his friends, family and scholars all say that he did not write drunk. But this notion persists, for Hemingway and beyond, because there is a myth about creativity and its sources.

Being high has long been associated with being more creative. Perhaps it is true for some people. Whether by placebo (simply believing it may make it true) or by chemical alteration (the brain does operate differently when high), some musicians may make objectively ‘better’ music when altered.

Others do not. Sometimes artists listen to a recording of the music they played while high, and what felt like connection and improv while high, turns out to suck when heard sober.

There is no doubt that substances alter reality and this connects to creativity. But the myth that someone can get fucked up and will wake up with a hit (from Keith Richards to Chance the Rapper) dismisses the talent and hard work that art necessitates.

I’m not going to speculate on the true source of creativity. Nor will I dismiss the connection of altered states to it. But art takes talent, and talent is enhanced by skills. So, if you are into creating... get focused on your skills. This T-Break is a good time to do it. (Like we established in Day 1: stay busy)

Challenge: Be creative right now. On the margins of this book, or the blank pages in back- doodle, draw, write down lyrics, anything...

