

Choose a Way to Give Up Substances

→ **Quit all at once.** This is the abstinence model developed in AA; it's also called quitting "cold turkey." It works well for some people. It may feel harder to start, but may be easier to stick to.

→ **Try an experiment.** Try this "warm turkey" rather than "cold turkey" method—give up substances just for a week to see what it's like. Then reevaluate it in therapy.

→ **Cut down gradually.** This is called harm reduction. Making progress, even slowly, is better than staying where you're at. If you're using every day, you can start by using every other day. If you're using cocaine and marijuana, you can give up cocaine but keep using marijuana. Eventually, you can give up substances completely once you achieve these smaller successes.

A key question: "Do I have to give up substance use completely?" It is clear that people with PTSD and substance abuse need to quit substances completely—at least for a while—to successfully heal from PTSD. Later, once their PTSD recovery is complete, they can explore whether any use is safe for them or not. Many people find that once they recover from PTSD, they no longer even want to use. In the substance abuse field, there is a lot of controversy about whether people with a history of substance abuse can ever use safely. Some people believe that "moderation management" or "controlled drinking" are possible, meaning that using may be okay as long as it is kept within certain limits. However, this is not considered safe for anyone who has a history of severe substance use. At this point, just know that you need to give up substances to heal from your PTSD.

★ *What plan can you commit to starting today? Choose one below, then fill in the "Notes."*

☐ **(1) Quit all at once** (the AA or "cold turkey" model).

☐ **(2) Try an experiment** (the "warm turkey" model). Please write down *how long* you'll give up substances: ____ week(s).

☐ **(3) Cut down gradually** (the "harm reduction" model). Write down on the back of this page exactly what substance(s) you'll cut down or give up. Also, write down how much and how often you'll be using at most (you can always use less, but not more!).

Notes:

(a) I also agree to throw out my _____ (substances) and all related paraphernalia.

(b) I also agree to ask _____ (people in my life) not to offer me substances or use around me.

Signed: _____ Dated: _____

☎ *If I cannot stick to my plan, I will leave a _____ [phone message? note?] for my _____ [therapist? sponsor? partner? friend?] to let him or her know within ____ hours.*

(cont.)

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SUGGESTIONS

☞ ***Get rid of substances in your environment to help your plan work.*** Throw out your stash of substances and tell people in your life not to offer you any.

☞ ***You can combine “Try an experiment” and “Cut down gradually” if you need to.*** If you are extremely afraid of reducing your use, you can try to give up a little just for a short time.

☞ ***Keep in mind that many people have strong opinions about how to give up substances.*** However, at this point, no one truly knows what works best, for whom, and how. Any of the three methods above may work as long as you keep at it. If you try one way and it doesn't work, you can reevaluate it with your therapist and then try another plan.

No matter what happens, you can cope safely without substances!
