Fun without drugs? [1]

Dear Alice,

I think it would be a good idea for me to stop smoking marijuana and cut down on my drinking, at least during the school year. The problem is, I have been doing it for so long it is almost as though I have forgotten how to have fun without it. Contributing to this problem is the fact that many of my friends smoke or drink to have fun. Many of my other friends just do not seem to have fun at all; they stay in Friday and Saturday nights to do work. I've found it difficult to quit, I think because I'm just not sure of what's out there to do that's fun without being stoned or drunk. Can you recommend anything that's fun whether you're intoxicated or sober, so that I don't have to stop hanging out with certain friends if I want to relax and have fun? I want to finally enjoy life without relying on an altered state of consciousness. What's there to do when you're sick of renting movies? Also, any tips for resisting the urge to take people up on their offer to toke up? (I'm never pressured into it, but it's like the dieter who's offered some chocolate cake ? it's there, it looks sooo good, and the fact that other people are doing it makes it seem more "okay.") Thanks so much.

? Baked or Bored

Answer

Dear Baked or Bored,

Hats off to you for taking control of your health and seeking strategies to get to a more sober state! You acknowledge at the outset that your trip (pun intended) may be full of challenges, temptations, and other potholes that could slow you down or send you back to the starting line. The good news is that there are a number of strategies and resources at your disposal that can help you limit your substance use and get involved in substance-free activities that aren't fun-free (read on for more on those). And, you don't have to do it alone. It's totally okay to make a few pit stops along your way, by checking in with a supportive friend, relative, or a professional, who can help you stay on course.

So, what is there to do after you've watched all the movies you can handle? As you begin to reduce your substance use, take some time to reflect on what makes you feel happy and fulfilled. Sharpening your awareness of your social, academic, professional, and spiritual interests can go a long way towards finding activities that excite you and people who share your interests outside of substance use. Consider these suggestions to get you started: organizations that work toward a cause in which you strongly believe, athletic groups, political
campaigns, reading circles, writing and theatrical clubs, and student organizations. When you find what you’re into, you might also invite your current group of friends to join you in some hang time sans substances. Getting involved in these types of activities may also pave the way to new friendships that don’t revolve around on using substances. Here are more ideas you can enjoy solo or with friends and family:

- **Get your sweat on!** Work out at the gym, try a new group exercise class, or plan to get physical outside. You could also consider joining an intramural sports team or sports league. If you’re a student, these options might be offered at your college or university and many local parks and recreation departments have offerings as well.

- **Soak up a bit of culture.** Visit museums or take a trip to a zoo or aquarium (any of which may offer discounted admission for students).

- **Start rollin’ with your homies.** Strap on a pair of skates (of the roller or ice variety) at a local rink or rent/borrow a bike to pedal about town.

- **Be a newbie.** Try being a tourist in your own city and find the hidden treasures in your neck of the woods by exploring new neighborhoods.

- **Find your folks.** Try perusing websites like Meetup.com [2] to find other people in your area that share your interests. If you don’t find a group that you’re into, you can have like-minded individuals seeking you out by creating a special-interest group of your own!

You also mention wanting to hang out with certain friends who still use. It is possible to avoid the tempting detours you mention, like ever-present alcohol or that stray joint. By engaging in some pre-planning before a night out, you can think ahead about how much you want to consume (if at all) and how to politely decline offers of alcohol or marijuana that might come your way. Start by thinking about how you’d ideally like to handle a situation when someone offers or encourages you to have a drink or take a hit. Some responses could include: “Thanks, but I’m cutting back for a while,” or “No dice? I have a drug test tomorrow.” It may also help to let others know that you’ve set a personal limit for the night or have stopped using if you find that helps you stick to your plan. Some other strategies you might find helpful are outlined in the Go Ask Alice! Q&A How do I drink in moderation? [3] There are also activities you can do that may help you check in with your internal state and strengthen your resolve to limit your substance use. Learning yoga, meditation, mindfulness, and other relaxation techniques have helped many on the same road to "dry fun" cope with stress resulting from this change in lifestyle, as well as provide motivation for improving mind-body health. To learn more about different relaxation techniques, check out Meditation, yoga, tai-chi? How do I begin? [4]

Lastly, it’s also worth mentioning that reducing any degree of psychological or physical dependence on substances takes time, and can be achieved through measured reductions in use of, in your case, alcohol and marijuana. In addition to filling your time with other activities and interests, you might consider speaking with a counselor or health care provider. S/he can help you define specific goals regarding your use, including how much you’d like to cut back and at what pace, which may make for a smoother ride.

Best of luck on the road to personal change!

Alice!

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