

# Some alternatives to using cannabis to cope with stress

- Women often report using cannabis as a way to cope with stress, depression, anxiety, adverse life events, or trauma and violence.

Here are some alternatives to cope with trauma and other stressors, and to stay healthy and resilient.

## 1 Grounding skills

Grounding exercises are practical activities that help you relax, stay present or re-connect with what is happening around you. Grounding skills can be used as a coping skill or as part of a safety plan when you are feeling overwhelmed or triggered. Here are some examples of grounding exercises:

- » **Breathe** in to a count of four. Pause your breath for a count of four. Breathe out to a count of four. Pause your breath for a count of four. Repeat several times.
- » **Carry a grounding object** such as a stone in your pocket. Touch it for comfort when you need to.
- » **Visualize** your fear dissolving like a melting ice cube.
- » **Talk yourself through** what you are experiencing. *"My heart is pounding". "These feelings will pass". "I will get through this".*

For more examples of grounding activities see:

- » [Grounding Activities and Trauma-Informed Practice](#) Centre of Excellence for Women's Health
- » Chapter 18 in [Finding your Best Self](#) by Lisa M Najavits gives examples of mental grounding, physical grounding, and soothing grounding, and encourages you to find which methods you like best.

## 2 Mindfulness Practice

Instead of numbing or escaping feelings as people often try to do by using cannabis and/or other substances, mindfulness practice encourages you to pay attention to your feelings. Mindfulness is about looking at thoughts and emotions with kindness and compassion for yourself. You can bring awareness to feelings and sensations in the body, observing them as they come and go. Being curious about yourself and recognizing the impermanence of feelings and thoughts can be very empowering. There are many apps, videos and books that can guide you in practicing mindfulness.

Examples of books about women and mindfulness:

- » [The Mindful Woman: Gentle Practices for Restoring Calm, Finding Balance, and Opening Your Heart](#) Sue Patton Thoele
- » [Real Change: Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves and the World](#) Sharon Salzberg
- » [Moment-by-Moment in Women's Recovery: A Mindfulness-Based Approach to Relapse Prevention](#) Hortensia Amara and Zayda Vallejo

### 3 Walking

Walking can help improve mental and physical health. Walking in nature can be especially helpful for decompressing, clearing your mind and focusing your intention. Walking can also be a social activity, a way to connect with [culture and the land](#), or to [“find your inner warrior”](#).

### 4 Recognizing social pain, avoiding dependence

It is very common for experiences of trauma to be connected to isolation, injustice, gaslighting, coercion, racism and sexism. It is important to recognize these experiences of social pain and not expect substances to cure them. When cannabis or other substances are used “to cope” it may increase your vulnerability to addiction.



All the activities captured on this sheet can help with social pain. Naming your trauma and discrimination and finding personal, healthy, positive activities are important. Some resources that may inspire:

- » [Finding your Best Self: Recovery from Addiction, Trauma or Both](#) Lisa M Najavits
- » [Empowering Girls](#), a program offered by the Canadian Women’s Foundation
- » [Powering Up: Trauma-Informed Leadership, From Self to Community](#), a workbook by YWCA Toronto, United Way Greater Toronto & Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health



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