

Coping with cravings

Tips to help you stay on course

WHAT IS A CRAVING?

A craving is a strong desire or urge to use a substance like nicotine, alcohol or other drug.

It can be experienced as an intense physical sensation, such as a taste in your mouth, tightness in your chest or tension in your stomach.

Cravings can also include strong emotions like anxiety, irritation, or panic, along with compulsive thoughts about using.

CRAVINGS ARE NORMAL

It is very common for people to experience cravings. They tend to be more intense in the early stages of cutting down or quitting.

THERE IS GOOD NEWS!

Cravings are not constant – *they will pass*. They lose their power over time – just like a stray cat, they stop coming back when you don't feed them.

Initially, it can be helpful to avoid cues and triggers for your substance use as much as possible. These might include people, places, situations, events etc...

Below we have listed some additional ways to manage or reduce your cravings over time.



The 3D's can help you deal with the cravings you can't avoid.

Delay: If you can delay the decision to use a substance, a craving (urge) can pass on its own.

Distract: Delaying the decision to use becomes easier if you engage in something distracting, such as playing a game on your phone, taking a walk, listening to music or scrolling online.

Deep breathing: breathing and other relaxation techniques can help you to stay calm during a craving.

Here are some suggestions from people who have changed their substance use:



Do something physical - walking, gym, regular exercise



Do something meaningful - hobby, community groups, study, work



Do something regularly - create a routine, daily schedule



Find supports - get counselling, find people/family who understand, be kind to yourself



Get help with other things - medical assistance, mental health care

Urge Surfing

Urge Surfing is another strategy. With this technique, you don't fight the craving.

Step 1: Begin by noticing where you feel the craving such as in your mouth, chest or stomach. Name it. Say to yourself "this is a craving, and it will pass."

Step 2: Next, take some deep breaths.

Step 3: Now think of your craving as a wave at the beach, starting off small and building to a peak, then eventually breaking and flowing away.

Step 4: Imagine yourself surfing these waves the way a surfer would successfully ride a wave at the beach.

Step 5: Continue to picture this until the intensity of the craving passes.



HALT

Other common causes of cravings -

HALT and ask yourself if you feel..

HUNGRY/THIRSTY?

ANGRY?

LONELY?

TIRED?

Try to address these things first (e.g. have something to eat or drink, rest, talk to someone about how you are feeling).

You may find the craving passes.



Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a strategy that has been found to help with cravings by directing attention to the present moment, including being aware of current sensations being experienced. It is a way of helping your mind to focus on the present.

If you would like to find out more about mindfulness, speak to a support worker/counsellor, join a group or download an app.

Remember

- Cravings are a normal part of changing substance use. Like a muscle, each time you try and use a new skill, you will gain more strength and confidence.
- Remember to ask yourself each time. "What did I learn from coping with that craving that will help me in the future?"
- Find ways to remind yourself of the reasons why you made the change in the first place (e.g. photos, screensavers, messages, mantras).
- Finally, remember to acknowledge and celebrate your achievements, no matter how small.

