

# Thinking about cutting back or quitting?



Name:

Date:

Firstly, what would you like to change about your substance use?

You're making a change because...

The people who could support you are... (think about family and friends as well as professional support workers)

The things which might make it hard to reach your goal/s are...

Some strategies to help you reach your goal/s are...

e.g. Avoiding things, places or people who make you think about drinking/using, putting your money in a secure account, monitoring your cravings/unplanned use in your phone, reconnecting with people who don't drink/use...

## PLEASE NOTE:

Cutting back or quitting can be easy for some people and hard for others. You may experience withdrawal symptoms – things like having difficulty concentrating, being irritable, feeling anxious, sick or having cravings.

Sudden withdrawal from daily/heavy use of certain substances – especially alcohol and benzos – can cause serious medical problems such as seizures. In these instances, follow a structured, gradual reduction plan created with a medical professional (which may include specific withdrawal medications). There are also effective longer-term substitution medications available for some substances (e.g. opioids).

If you experience a sudden and/or significant change in mood or see, feel or hear things that are not real when withdrawing from a substance, please seek immediate help by calling triple zero '000' or going to your nearest hospital emergency department.

The following page lists some useful craving management strategies you might like to try.

# Looking after yourself during cravings

A craving is a strong desire or urge to use a substance. This might be an unpleasant physical sensation, such as a taste in your mouth, tight chest or stomach tension. It could also be a strong emotion, such as feeling anxious or panicked, or having racing thoughts.

## Cravings are normal, however there is good news!

They 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. Here are some strategies below which you might find helpful.

### The 3 D's can help you deal with stress or cravings...

#### DELAY

If you can delay the decision to drink or use for 5 minutes, or half an hour, a craving can eventually pass on its own.

#### DISTRACT

It is easier to delay the decision if you are doing something to distract yourself (e.g. playing a game on your phone, eating, going for walk, listening to music, watching TV etc).

#### DEEP BREATHING

Breathing and other relaxation techniques can help you to stay calm during a craving.

### Self-awareness

Mindfulness is a strategy that has been found to help with cravings by redirecting attention and memory away from the sensation. It is a way of helping your mind to focus on the present.

**If you want to learn more, speak to a counsellor, join a group or download an app.**

### Urge surfing

Urge surfing is another strategy. With this technique, you don't fight the craving – instead you focus on it.

**STEP 1** Begin by noticing where you feel the craving (e.g. in your mouth, chest or stomach). Name it. Say to yourself "this is a craving, and it will pass."

**STEP 2** Next, notice yourself breathing in and out, keeping your eyes open or closed, whichever feels more comfortable.

**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.

### Other common causes of cravings

**HALTS** and ask yourself if you feel...

- Hungry/thirsty?
- Angry?
- Lonely?
- Tired?
- Sad/stressed/sick?

Try and minimise being in any of these states as much as possible.

### REMEMBER...

- Cravings are a normal part of changing substance use. Like a muscle, each time you practise 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 celebrate your achievements, even small ones (such as saying no or using less, cooking a meal, exercising - nothing is too small!) all the way through to big ones such as reconnecting with family or friends, or re-engaging in study or work.

### It might also help to...

- Catch up again to discuss your progress
- See a doctor or other health professional, such as a specialist alcohol and drug worker.
- Help is available
- Treatment works
- People can make successful changes around their substance use.

- If you are trying to quit, sometimes it can take a few attempts. Learn from any slip-ups and keep going.

**WHERE TO GO FOR MORE HELP...** Call the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline for free, confidential, 24-hour telephone counselling, advice and referral. **Phone 1800 250 015**

**Congratulations!** You now have a plan. Take this tool with you to refer back to at any time.



Consumers and / or carers provided feedback on this publication

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