



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.

This might be an unpleasant physical sensation, such as a taste in your mouth, tight chest or stomach tension. It could be a strong emotion such as being anxious or feelings of panic. It could also involve other experiences like racing thoughts.

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 always pass.**

They lose their power over time - just like a stray cat, they stop coming back when you don't feed them.

You want to avoid **cues** and **triggers** for your substance use as much as possible. These might include people, places, situations, events.

3D's

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

DELAY

If you can delay the decision to 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, eat, go for walk, listen to music, watch TV).

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

Hobbies, community groups, study, work

Do something regular

Create a routine, have a daily schedule

Find support

Counselling, find people or family who understand, be kind to self

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 (e.g. 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.

Other Common Causes of Cravings

HALT and ask yourself if you feel..

Hungry?
/ Thirsty?



Lonely?



Angry?



Tired?



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

Mindfulness

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 would like to find out more about mindfulness, speak to a 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).

Don't forget that professional help such as medical assistance, mental health care, and medications are also available to support you.

Finally, remember to **celebrate your achievements**. This could be anything from *reconnecting with family or friends, saying no or using less, cooking a meal, exercising* - **nothing is too small!**