

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING YOUR CRAVINGS–

Noel haarbuerger, 2025

An addiction is defined by - An addiction is manifested in any behaviour, substance, object or activity that a person craves, finds temporary relief or pleasure in, but suffers negative consequences as a result of, and yet has difficulty giving up despite its negative consequences. (Gabor Mate).

What is an urge or craving – An urge or craving is any set of thoughts, images, feelings, desires, fears or physical sensations that feed your addictive or compulsive habit. It is anything in your experience that you identify that motivates you to act on your craving.

1. **TRIGGERS** – Learn to notice your inner and outer triggers? Ask yourself:
 - What outside circumstances and stressors (time to myself, an argument, job pressures, debts), and
 - Internal thoughts and images, feelings states (stress, loneliness, boredom, anger, hurt) are most likely to trigger me to have a craving?
2. **RECOGNIZE YOUR HAVING A CRAVING** – See if you can catch your craving before you act on it compulsively and on automatic pilot. Notice the anatomy of your craving. What is it made of? Thoughts, images, sensations, feelings?
3. **FOCUS ON BODY SENSATIONS OF THE CRAVING WITH CURIOSITY**– when you notice a craving has been triggered, if possible grab a moment by yourself, and take a couple of deep, slow breaths and focus all your curiosity and attention on where you feel the urge showing up in your body. What is the shape of the sensations/feeling, the size, location, color and quality of it. Don't fight it. Just watch until it changes naturally like a wave peaking and subsiding in the ocean. Notice and look for the first indicators of the craving reducing in intensity. For a couple of minutes, while breathing slowly, focus on the sensations in your body - **TRACK, ALLOW AND FOLLOW** them. This can help “center” and relax you, and remind you that your cravings are impermanent (will pass with time), and that you are bigger than them. If you understand this, you can ‘choose’ how to respond to it. Do this for a minute at least before you decide to act on your urge and see if you can stretch out the amount of time you can do this. Bringing in mindfulness creates a gap bw the craving and the behaviour.
4. **RECOGNIZING, ALLOW AND BEFRIEND YOUR FEELINGS AND BODY SENSATIONS** – See if you can practice recognizing and allow any underlying feelings and body sensations behind the craving to be as they are. Ask yourself:

- What am I really feeling now? (agitation, fear, grief, hurt, emptiness, depression, numbness, aloneness, shame) What is it about?
 - What does this feeling need from me right now that would sooth it?
 - What is it telling me about what I need to do, express or let go of?
 - Once you can recognize the underlying feelings, **practice the attitude of paying attention to, and allowing the feeling to be there without trying to change it or judge it. Focus on what the feeling feels like in you body – where is it located, what is its shape, temperature, quality?** Getting support to talk about these underlying issues/feelings may help you to resolve them more quickly.
 - Imagine sending this feeling/sensation compassion by putting your hand over part of your body where the feeling is and speaking to it with kindness. *I'm here for you! Your welcome here. Ill support you. Notice what happens as you say this to yourself.*
5. **STAY MINDFUL IF YOU DECIDE TO ACT ON YOUR CRAVING** – Notice as much detail as you can before, during and after the usage or habit pattern being enacted. Be particularly curious - what is the quality of experience (*thoughts, images, feelings and sensations*) before and during the craving, and what happens as you use or act on the compulsion. Try not to slide into automatic pilot. Stay mindful! How rewarding is it really and how long the reward lasts for? What is the need that gets met and how long does this last for? Then notice what happens after. What thoughts, feelings and body sensations arise after your habit or substance use. What are the consequences? Be mindful of the whole process and notice what parts of the process lead to suffering? Then once you've seen all this, ask yourself, *is this habit really worth it?*
6. **DELAY, DISTRACT and REFOCUS ATTENTION**
Delay your craving and distract yourself by finding something else to do for a while.
- Go the movies, call a friend, read a book, ride your bike, go for a walk, be in nature, engage a hobby, channel your energy into something constructive or pleasurable.
 - What other activities in your life give you pleasure and satisfaction now or in the past before your addiction took over?
 - Do an activity that meets the same needs of the addiction in a more wholesome way. **Take some time to think about this and how you can re-connect with these activities – or new ones.**
7. **OBSERVE SEDUCTIVE SELF -TALK OF THE URGE** – Pay attention to all the things the '**voice of your urge**' says to you; What fantasies go with this, and the things that *seduce and trick you into maintaining your habit* of behavior or addiction. E.g., with drug using, gambling or drinking
- *This will make you feel better; This will make the pain go away.*
 - *Just a little smoke/drink/gamble won't hurt me*

- *You deserve to have a drink/smoke ect. You've earned it!*

Become an expert on your self-talk when it comes to your addiction or habit of behaviors. **What does your urge say to you that seduces you into action?**

8. **CHALLENGE THE SELF-TALK** - Begin to challenge and question the truth and promises of this voice. Will it really make me feel better especially in the long run? Are there other ways that I can feel good? Is it really true that it won't hurt my well being? Spend some time, and *plan ahead (when you don't have the urge) to think of things you can say, when the need arises, that will challenge and question the ways your urge tricks you into acting, and feeds you with unrealistic fantasies.*
9. **SEE THE CRAVING AS A PART OF YOU**– Try to visualize your urge/craving as a part of you rather than all of you. Imagine seeing your urge to gamble, drink or use drugs as a separate entity within you that is trying to undermine and control your life. Give it a name, an image (e.g a monster, picture of someone you despise), and set of negative characteristics that you can associate with it. This way you can begin to dissolve the positive associations you normally attribute to this voice, and feel the destructive impact it really has on your life. Instead of being the urge, you can relate to it. When you can see it, you don't have to be it! This gives you much more choice and agency in how to respond to it.
10. **VISUALIZE THE CONSEQUENCES ahead of time**– Think about how good you will feel if you do not drink, eat, gamble, substance use - and the likely consequences of how you will feel if you choose to continue.
 - Bring to mind an image of a negative or horrible time after acting on your urge (behavioral habit, drinking, smoking, gambling ect.).
 - Imagine where your life will end up if you continue to act on your urges in the future.
 - Visualize how good your life would be if your habit or addiction was out of the picture.
 - Acknowledge the suffering caused by your addiction or habit, and associate pleasure with change. This is essential for regaining control.
11. **SELF AGENCY** - Remind yourself that only you are responsible for your addiction and that you are using this as a way of coping (regulating your feelings and nervous system) at the moment, give your current access to inner and outer resources and support. The more you blame others for your habit the more stuck you will remain. Alternatively, when you acknowledge your own responsibility for using this addiction as a way of meeting your needs/coping with pain, you have power to change, and develop agency, new skills and choices in how to meet those needs. Only through taking responsibility and accessing your own agency can you become conscious of why you (drink, smoke, gamble ect), and know what blocks you from changing.
12. **MEET YOUR NEEDS IN HEALTHY WAYS**– Ask yourself what needs are getting met from acting on this urge? *All addictions or habits meet some important*

need and are often ways of managing difficult feelings or replacing something that missing in your life. It is important that you discover what you get out of acting on your urge?

- Is it relaxation, excitement, peace, self-esteem, identity, confidence, taking risks, aliveness, time out, a sense of belonging, turning out from worry, pain or loneliness?

Then ask yourself:

- How else can I begin to meet this need in a healthier more wholesome way?
- Where else could I get this need met?

Make a decision to do something positive about this now.

13. **CREATE OBSTACLES** - Make it harder to give in to an urge by creating obstacles for yourself, e.g

- Tell others about your urge and what triggers it.
- Avoid places, things or people that trigger your urge. The biggest risk factor to maintaining addictions is access to it!!
- Carry little money with you. Give your credit card to someone who can look after it.
- Don't stock chocolate in your pantry!!

14. **GET SUPPORT** – Call or talk to someone you trust, about your urge. Get support. Build a community of people who are on the same recovery path as you. The more you talk about your urges the less power they will have over you. Secrecy is one the main things that fuel urges and addictive habits. Let a loved one and friend know you are Struggling with this addiction.

15. **CONNECT TO YOUR INTENTION AND DECIDE** – Make a decision for yourself if you want to stop or just reduce your addiction or habit.

- Think honestly about what is really possible for you given the power of your urges/cravings. It may be more realistic to achieve your goal in stages.
- Set realistic steps for yourself. If you want to control your habit, you can still benefit from many of these strategies.

16. **REWARD YOUR SUCCESSES** - It is important that you start to build positive associations with the changes you begin to make, to support and reinforce your motivation to change. This can be achieved by giving yourself a conscious reward for any small changes you have made. What healthy and positive rewards can you give yourself for the changes you have made? It doesn't have to cost a lot – just feel good.

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