

# Craving Survival Guide



Experiencing cravings and learning to deal with them is essential part of recovery.

They can feel very distressing

**BUT...**

Even the most intense craving **WILL GO AWAY**. They get stronger only up to a point and then weaken and disappear.

Cravings cannot harm you, you are able to control the urge to use or drink and make the right decisions.

Triggers are not permanent and will become extinct if you continue to avoid using.

**Here are six useful methods for dealing with cravings when they occur:**

- **distraction**
- **copng flashcards**
- **imagery**
- **rational responses to automatic thoughts**
- **activity**
- **relaxation**

**1. Distraction** - the goal of these methods is to move your attention away from negative thoughts or uncomfortable feelings, and focus on something more neutral. They seem simple, but can all be effective -

- Concentrate on your surroundings and describe them to yourself in detail, this can be quite 'grounding' when you feel like you're losing it.
- Talk to someone, anyone. A trusted friend, relative, your key-worker or even a total stranger if need be. It can help you get away from that loop running in your head.
- Change the scenery - go for a walk, a drive, a bike ride, just get away from wherever you are right now.
- Cleaning up or other household chores can be hugely distracting if you're craving, and you might feel some sense of achievement too.
- Video games (or indeed the old fashioned kind) can require enough concentration and challenge to take your mind off it, and of course, you can play them alone.
- These are just suggestions; you now need to think of other things which are quite distracting and enjoyable. Discuss these ideas together and pick out the ones which you think will work best for you.

What are they?

**2. Coping Flashcards** - when you're in the grip of an intense craving, it's hard to think rationally and remember all the things you're supposed to. So writing yourself some instructions on a small card can be useful. (This helps tremendously for people with anxiety problems too). The cards can then be pushed into your purse/wallet/pocket so they are at hand when you need them.

The message should be simple and direct and should be aimed at either convincing yourself that you *can* cope with this situation, or to remind yourself what you've achieved so far and what you will be losing if you drink or use drugs. Here are a few examples of things you might write:

- things are going well with my partner right now, I don't want to mess it up
- this craving will pass if I just give it time
- I'm not helpless here, what action can I take?
- what are the pros and cons right now?

Now create your own flashcards; make them as bright and colourful and as striking as you can.

**3. Imagery** - there are a few different types of imagery which can work -

- Command your craving to STOP (see a big stop sign), then refocus on a relaxing location of your choice - a favourite peaceful spot.
- If you start remembering good times when you were using, then replace that image with the bad times, your lowest ebb when you felt ashamed and disgusted, do you want to end up back there?
- If it's negative, depressing images that are giving you cravings then imagine an optimistic view of your near future, with friends or family, having fun without using (or any other positive image).
- If you know you've got an event coming up which will give you cravings - try rehearsing the image in your head of you dealing with it appropriately. Run through the feelings you'll have so you are not caught off-guard by them.

While you are in a safe space think of other types of imagery that will work for you:

1.	
2.	
3.	

**4. Rational Responses to Automatic Thoughts** - whenever you feel a craving, ask yourself “what thoughts are going through my head right now”. Many of the thoughts you are having will themselves be responsible for your craving. It becomes a matter of responding to those thoughts in a more rational way.

Look for evidence to back up or contradict your thoughts and ask yourself:

- What will happen after I have used or drank, how will I feel when the effects have worn off?
- Can I look at this situation differently?
- If what I’m thinking is true, what *really* are the consequences?
- What is likely to happen if I carry on thinking like this?
- Am I really just going to stop at the one?
- What positive action can I take to solve this problem?
- Is what I’m going through now *truly* unbearable?

Try not to make such catastrophic predictions about your cravings, like “there’s no way I can stand this, so I might as well just use and get it over with”, “I keep having cravings, I can’t beat this...” etc.

While you are in a safe space think of other rational responses with which you can respond to cravings:

What my ‘craving thoughts’ usually say	How can I challenge these thoughts?

**5. Activity** - if you've had an addiction for a long time, then you may not have many hobbies left. In fact using or drinking are the only activities some people actually do for fun. So when you try and stop, boredom is one of the biggest hurdles. There's no way around it - you're going to have to try some new activities.

When you've found a few that you like, make sure you schedule them in every week:

"On Tuesday I'm going swimming, on Thursday I'm going to the cinema with Sally, on Saturday I'm getting out to the countryside for a walk with my partner."

It may feel weird to some to plan your week this way, but it really works. Include your treatment appointments, but also your 'time off'.

Now have a go:

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

**6. Relaxation** - Anxiety, Anger, Frustration and Stress are amongst the biggest triggers for cravings. So learning some relaxation techniques can be a life-saver. If you're not so tense, you're less likely to act impulsively. And if you've been using drugs to relax for a long time, then you are going to *have to* learn some other methods.

The most useful relaxation exercise for me is

It will take a while to learn these new techniques, as with any new skill, but keep at it. **REMEMBER** that over time your cravings will become less severe and will eventually become extinct **IF** you don't give in to them.

Remember - It's just a craving, it won't kill you.

## 7. Cravings Diaries.

Cravings diaries can be very useful for several reasons: they can point out triggers that you may have missed; they allow you to look for any patterns, which can help you to prepare for potential cravings in advance; they can reassure you that the frequency and intensity of cravings are diminishing over time; and they can reinforce which of the coping strategies you have used work best.

### Coping With Cravings and Urges

#### Reminders:

- **Cravings are common and normal. They are not a sign of failure.**
- **Cravings are like ocean waves. They get stronger only to a point, then they start to go away.**
- **If you don't use, your cravings will weaken and eventually go away. Cravings only get stronger if you give in to them.**
- **You can try to avoid cravings by avoiding or eliminating their triggers.**
- **When they happen you can *cope* with cravings by -**
  - **distraction**
  - **copied flashcards**
  - **imagery**
  - **rational responses to automatic thoughts**
  - **activity**
  - **relaxation**