

What is a craving?

A craving is a strong desire or urge to use alcohol or other drugs. You may experience this in your body as an unpleasant physical sensation, such as sweating or tension in the stomach. You may also experience it as a strong emotion or worrying thoughts.

Cravings are a normal response to cutting down or stopping. They tend to be more intense if you have used substances over a long period and/or in large amounts. Cravings are strongest in the early stages of change.

The good news is that cravings are not constant. They tend to last for a matter of minutes and then pass. They begin to lose their power when you don't feed them. Like a stray cat that is not fed, eventually the cat, or the craving, won't keep coming back.

Struggling with cravings?

It helps to avoid situations that can trigger cravings, especially when you are adjusting to change. When you can't avoid this, try some of these ideas:

- Delay making a decision on whether to use for 5 minutes, half an hour, or longer.
- Distract yourself e.g. text a friend, eat, go for a walk or run, play a game on your phone, listen to some music or watch TV.
- Deep breathing & other relaxation techniques can help you to stay calm e.g. smell a favourite scent, swim, chew gum, shower, sing or stretch.
- Mindfulness activities can help you to recognise and manage cravings.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness can help you to pay attention to the present moment, including the thoughts, feelings, and body sensations that occur during a craving. Mindfulness and grounding activities can help you to feel calm, manage impulses, and make better decisions when you are faced with a difficult situation and the urge to drink or use drugs. Here is a simple activity you could try:

- **Stop** what you are doing right now
- **Take** 3 deep breaths
- **Observe** what you can see, hear, touch, smell (ground yourself)
- **Picture** where you want to be and reflect on how far you have come. Remember your goals and reasons for making changes, cutting back or stopping.

The more you practice paying attention when you are feeling calm and relaxed, the more this can help you to slow things down and not get caught up in a craving.

Urge Surfing is another strategy. This technique can help you to not fight against the craving.

- Begin by noticing where you experience the craving e.g. in your mouth, stomach or chest.
- Next take some deep breaths.
- 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.
- Imagine yourself 'surfing' these waves the way a surfer would successfully ride a wave. The urge is still there but you're not using your energy to fight it, more to ride it out.
- Continue to picture this until the intensity of the craving passes and you imagine the wave breaking on the beach. You can try this technique with your eyes closed or open.

These can be common triggers for cravings?

When you are experiencing a craving or discomfort, **HALT** and ask yourself if you feel...

Hungry/Thirsty?

Angry?

Lonely?

Tired?

Sometimes strategies may not work so well the first time, and just like a muscle you need to build it up by practising. If they didn't work, rather than being critical, ask yourself,

What did I learn that will help me in the future?

Maybe it was realising that cravings pass, that you feel uncomfortable but can still stay on course, or that certain situations are better to avoid or plan for.

What has worked for others

To help you stay on course, consider how you could include these in your life. Here are some suggestions from people who have changed their use of alcohol or other drugs.

1. Regular movement and exercise (e.g. go for a walk or step outside, gym, yoga, gardening)
2. Nurturing (e.g. cook a healthy meal, drink water, work on getting a better night's sleep, spend time in nature)
3. Meaningful activities (e.g. try something new, rediscover an old interest, study/work/volunteer)
4. Ways of managing difficult feelings and thoughts (e.g. write a journal, listen to a podcast, mindfulness/grounding/deep breathing exercises)
5. Keep yourself safe (e.g. create a space that feels safe and soothing, avoid risky situations or people with the same problem, delete people from phone contacts)
6. A daily schedule or regular routines (e.g. plan each day/week ahead, have something to look forward to each day, attend weekly counselling)

7. Building confidence and a positive attitude (e.g. value, encourage and be kind to yourself and others, don't punish yourself, and remember a lapse is not a relapse)
8. Supportive people (e.g. find people that understand, connect with good friends and family)
9. Get help with other needs (e.g. seek medical, finance, parenting/relationship, housing, mental health care, or rehabilitation support)

What help is available?

Adis 24/7 Alcohol and Drug Support is a 24 hour, 7 day a week confidential support service for people in Queensland with alcohol and other drug concerns, their families and health professionals.

Talk to us. Anytime, anywhere.
1800 177 833

What should I do in an emergency?

If someone has collapsed or lost consciousness, call an ambulance on **triple zero (000)**. If they have stopped breathing commence CPR. If they are breathing normally, place them into the recovery position and wait with the person until the ambulance has arrived.

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