

Crush Cravings

What are cravings?

Cravings are intense thoughts and feelings (urges) that make you want to use. Other words for cravings include: 'fiending', 'yearning', 'thirsting', 'longing', 'hanging'.

Cravings...

- can feel overwhelming or *irresistible*.
- can come out of nowhere.
- can be brought on by memories, reminders, people, places, thoughts and feelings.
- cravings are caused by your brain triggering the same *pleasure zones* that fire up when you use alcohol or drugs (or other addictive behaviours like gambling).
- cravings *gradually decrease* in the days from when you last used. They're usually worse in the first week after stopping use but become less intense and less frequent over time.

Examples of cravings

- Jen has stopped using cannabis as she has exams and needs to study. The problem is she's getting worried about passing her tests and she is used to taking cannabis to calm herself down. Now when she gets worried she craves cannabis and wants to use.
- Matt is trying to reduce the amount he drinks by having alcohol free days. However, he's used to getting home from his course and having a few beers to chill out. Even driving home after course makes him start craving alcohol.
- Hazel is having a break from meth but her friends keep texting her to tell her about the next dance party they're going to and each time she has to deal with intense cravings to go partying again. She knows that if she does go dancing, she'll most likely take something if it's offered.

What to do about cravings

Three D's

1. *Delay* - you know that cravings *will pass*, so delay.
 - Put off using for x mins and see if the craving has passed
 - Set an alarm
 - Count up to 100 etc.
2. *Distract* yourself – have a *list* of things to do and keep you *busy* when you crave.
 - Mindfulness – breathing or relaxation exercises
 - Exercise – walking, gym, sports etc
 - Stuff with your hands – lego, knitting, card tricks, drawing
 - Entertainment - music, podcasts, movies, reels
3. *Decide* and/or remind yourself of the *reasons* to not use and your goals.
 - What are the good things about not using?
 - What are the not good things about using?
 - By beating these cravings I am hoping to...
 - In the future I'm going to...

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Three A's

1. *Accept* cravings

- Knowing that cravings are normal and expected can help. This isn't something weird that only you are going through... it happens to *everyone*.
- Remember that cravings always *pass and fade away* after a time.
- Imagine your cravings or urges are like *waves* that rise and then fall away. They start small, grow in size, then break up and disappear.

2. *Avoid* cues

- *Cues* are things that remind you of using and start cravings off.
- Anything and everything can be a cue, so you can't avoid them all, however some things (cues) will be stronger than others so watch out for them.
- *Strong* cues can be people, places, having alcohol or drugs available, boredom, some emotions (though these can be hard to avoid).

3. *Affirm* yourself

- Think *positive* 'I can get through this', 'I've done it before'!
- *Praise* yourself about your progress 'I'm doing the best I can', 'Get in sister!'
- Be your own *cheerleader* 'You can do it! Keep up the good work!'
- *Reward* yourself for getting through cravings or your progress in general – watch something, do something fun, take a break, have something nice to eat.

Three P's

1. *People*

- Ask positive, understanding and *supportive* people to help you when you have strong cravings.
- *Explain* what you are going through and ask if they can be more understanding than usual should you be irritable, emotional or demanding.
- Let your support people know how best they can help you. *Tell them* when you need them to do something with you (distract), when you want to be left alone, when you want to talk or etc.

2. *Prepare*

- Be prepared so that when cravings hit, you have a *plan* to deal with them (i.e. the three D's).
- If possible, have healthy snacks and food available, keep hydrated and keep the environment you're staying in warm, cosy and clean.
- Have *distraction* activities and entertainment ideas ready to go, so you can use them when needed.

3. *Peace*

- Be *kind* to yourself and don't be hard on yourself if you do give in to a craving. Cravings aren't easy and the fact you are trying is way better than doing nothing.
- *Don't fight* against cravings, as this often gives them power and makes them stronger. Focus on your breath and shift your mind to other things rather than going into battle against your urges.
- Get good at *chilling out*. You'll get better at relaxation exercises, breathing techniques and mindfulness activities if you practice them regularly. Then, they'll be more likely to work when you need them.