

**Addiction and Recovery:  
Take Action Now to Stop Drug Cravings  
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Most people in the very earliest days of addiction recovery experience cravings. It is a common experience in addiction recovery. Alcohol or other drug (AOD) cravings do not mean that you are not working a good program of recovery. With continued abstinence over time, cravings will be reduced in intensity and duration. Eventually, cravings may disappear altogether. To reduce the impact of alcohol/drug cravings, it is appropriate very early on, to identify the "when", "who", "where", "what" factors in triggers for cravings. Ask yourself the following questions:

- "When am I most likely to have cravings?"
- "Who am I most likely to be around when I have cravings?"
- "Where am I most likely to be when I have cravings?"
- "What kinds of things am I doing when I have cravings?"
- "What kinds of things am I thinking when I have cravings?"
- "What kinds of things am I feeling when I have cravings?"

Identifying these factors can help you avoid some triggers. Identifying these craving cues can also help you develop a plan to manage and reduce the impact of the ones you cannot avoid. Techniques for coping with cravings and being able to maintain your sobriety in the face of those cravings are listed here:

1. If you find yourself in a dangerous situation, leave. Get out of there. Fast. You don't have to make any excuses or apologize; just leave.
2. Use distraction as a tool. Find something else to do--something to occupy your thoughts, time, behavior. Distract yourself with a new (or old) hobby like knitting, cross-word puzzles, reading, anything that does not involve cues for cravings.
3. Have a harmless temporary substitute available. Substitutes that do not involve other chemicals, or obsessive compulsive behaviors can be used in a pinch. Substitutes like candy, trail mix, gum, stirring straws may help. Substitutes like sex, spending, gambling, may be tendency toward cross-addictions and should be avoided.
4. Reach out to others. Call someone that supports your not drinking/using. Call your accountability partners. Call someone in AA/NA, your spouse, your sibling, anyone that will encourage you to not use. Have a phone list, where you can go down the list calling in the reinforcements to help you resist cravings before you use. Have a list so that someone will always be available. Keep calling until you get the support you need.
5. Keep an ongoing list of reasons why you want to quit using. Post it around the house. Recite the reasons that you decided to quit drinking/using in the first place.

Some people find it helpful to have a "reasons for quitting" list in their wallet. Others find it helpful to have "reasons for quitting" list posted around the house and in the automobile.

6. Keep an ongoing gratitude list. Add to it when craving. Add the positive benefits that you have derived from not drinking/using that day, week, or month.
7. Challenge your distorted thinking processes. Identify any positive expectations that you may be harboring about using, and tell yourself the truth about what happened in the past when you used. Remind yourself why you decided to quit in the first place. Challenge the expectation that the chemical will have a positive effect, that it will do for you what you want it to. Tell yourself the truth about what the chemical did "to" you, rather than "for" you.
8. Challenge any self-pitying self-talk that you may have about "having to give up the chemical". Remind yourself of the negatives that you are "giving up" by quitting. Replace thoughts of loss with affirmations of positive choices to re-gain control of your life and your happiness by eliminating the source of the problem.
9. Think through the first drink/drug into the negative consequences. Remind yourself that you cannot have "just one" and that the negative consequences are sure to follow.
10. Use prayer to resist cravings.
11. Make a list of the roles that the chemical played in your life. Identify at least three healthy alternatives as replacements. Think about what you want the chemical to do now. Use the healthy alternatives instead.
12. Write a letter to someone you love and explain to them why you are not using.
13. Use thought stopping techniques to combat compulsive thoughts about using. An example might be to visualize a stop sign, or rubbing a rubber band on your wrist to ground you in the here and now. If you keep seeing the chemical in your mind's eye, visualize a skull and cross bones superimposed over it.
14. If your defenses kick in and you are thinking that you can use some other drug besides your most recent drug of choice, tell yourself the truth, that it's all the same thing.
15. Pull out your desire chip from AA or your NA key chain and rub it.
16. Read recovery literature; go to a meeting.
17. Combat each craving, one at a time, one day at a time, or if necessary, one hour or minute at a time. Do what you have to do resist the craving and not use.

Keep reminding yourself that the craving will go away if you don't use. Also remind yourself that you don't have to quit forever, just this one day, or one hour, or one minute. Then the next day, hour, or minute, decide to stay sober another day, hour, or minute. The cravings will pass, and one day you will have a lot of minutes, hours, and days, months, and years, back to back, when you have been, and are, clean and sober.

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