

**Addiction and Recovery –
Top 10 Craving Management Tools That Alcoholic Addicts Should Use to
Not Take the First Drink
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

The very beginning of recovery efforts are aimed at interrupting the self-perpetuating momentum of drinking or other drug usage. Not taking the "first" drink or drug in the cycle represents the first step in breaking this momentum. The "first drink or drug" is defined as the consumption of the first drink or drug that day, or after a period of abstinence.

This period of abstinence, even though perhaps brief, may involve the beginning of detox or withdrawal symptoms. Cravings for the chemical are often quite high and intense at this time, as the cycle seeks to be maintained. Addiction is marked by a loss of control over the use of the chemical. Once the first drug of the day (or of the cycle) has been consumed, the addict cannot have confidence in his or her control over what will happen next. That is why we focus on establishing abstinence with the "first drink" or the "first drug". To not take the first drink or the first drug, try these simple techniques.

1. When dealing with cravings or urges to use alcohol or other drugs, it is helpful to remind yourself that your cravings are a normal response to withdrawal and the detox process. Remind yourself that withdrawal and detox are a temporary condition. The longer that you are abstinent, the fewer the cravings and the intensity. Cravings are also short in immediate duration. If you postpone using for a few minutes, the craving will usually subside.
2. Identify the cues or triggers that have set up the cravings. Have you recently experienced environmental cues or emotional/psychological cues? Resist the cravings and spend your mental energy thinking about how you can avoid these same triggers in the immediate future or how you deal with them without using.
3. Identify the positive things you are expecting the drug to do for you. If appropriate, challenge the belief that the drug will actually accomplish that expectation. Ask yourself if the drug was still doing for you what you wanted it to do, then identify the consequences that occurred because you used the drug. Your belief in the drug's ability to perform a positive service for you probably does not fit your experience right before you decided to quit using. The drug had turned on you by then. Tell yourself the truth about the drug.
4. When dealing with emotional triggers, ask yourself what emotions or stressors you are experiencing? What other methods do you know to deal with these stressors? Practice new living skills.
5. Make notes and put them all over your house and your car to remind yourself of why you quit drinking/using in the first place.
6. Practice distraction until the craving has gone. Do something to engage your thinking, your attention, your body, so that you give the craving a chance to pass.
7. Challenge cognitive distortions that feed the craving. Identify the thoughts that you are having that make it ok to relapse. Challenge each thought as it comes up. These cognitive distortions are lies and defenses that make it ok to relapse.

8. Call on others for help. Call someone in AA/NA, someone in your family that supports your recovery, or your sponsor and talk to them about cravings and why you wanted to get sober in the first place.
9. Use your spirituality to resist cravings. Use prayer, meditation, or reciting the Serenity Prayer, or making a gratitude list for what you have already received in recovery.
10. Use thought stopping techniques, like visualizing a stop sign, and saying "stop!", replacing positive memories about using with realistic appraisals of your current situation, or using grounding exercises, such as observing the objects around you (i.e., 3 things I see, hear, touch).

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