

Coping with Cravings

Some Helpful Coping Strategies

- Walking/exercise
- Hobbies
- Support Groups (Problem Solving and Support /AA /NA)
- Developing a daily plan and an overall routine
- Calling a friend
- Doing yoga or meditation
- Listening to music

Sometimes, people think they have cravings to use alcohol or drugs, but really, its something else. The next time you experience a craving, HALT and ask yourself the following questions: Am I HUNGRY? Am I ANGRY? Am I LONELY? Am I TIRED? If the answer is yes, taking care of yourself could make you feel better.

Hungry - Normal hunger experiences include stomach growling, nausea, moodiness, tiredness, weakness, dizziness or shakes and are very similar to withdrawal symptoms. These sensations make people feel use again because the physical discomfort can also lead to negative thoughts and emotions that substances could relieve the feelings. It is important to eat regularly scheduled healthy meals to reduce cravings and aid in the bodies recovery as it grows stronger physically and psychologically.

Angry – Feeling anger is natural. Anger can sometimes motivate people to make positive changes or it can cause the person to make problematic changes that create consequences. Common traits when angry can include shakes, feeling hot, anxious and the inability to concentrate on important tasks and can also be experienced when craving a substance. In order to manage anger and minimizing the risk of relapse it is important to take time for ourselves, practice self care and using coping strategies.

Lonely – Feeling lonely is not the same as just being alone. Loneliness is the feeling of being disconnected from others and feeling sad about it. Everyone feels lonely at times and it can often lead to normal but when nothing is done to change it feelings of depression and hopelessness can come forward. In order to move on from the feelings of recognize is the feeling and then to do something about it such as reaching out to a friend to help yourself or your friend. Engaging in activities that you both share an interest in can reduce the feelings of loneliness and the boredom that can occasionally stem using a substance.

Tired – REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep is the deep sleep that allows people to dream, memories are imprinted as the brain organizes thoughts and the body heals itself. Substance use can often disrupt the REM sleep that the body needs and when use stops the body can experience REM Rebound. This is when the body catches up on REM sleep where people experience very vivid dreams. It is important to keep a regular sleep routine. A regular sleep routine includes going to bed and getting up at a regular time, avoiding caffeine and nicotine before bed, and having short naps (20-30 min) when your body is overly exhausted.

Self Assessment

Here are some common triggers. Check any that might apply to you.

Having strong uncomfortable emotions

- Sadness
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Boredom

Dealing with physical discomfort

- Pain
- Symptoms of withdrawal
- Fatigue
- Illness/nausea

Having an urge or a craving

- Thinking about the alcohol or drug
- Seeing the alcohol or drug
- When I'm with others who are drinking or using drugs
- When others ask me or pressure me to drink or use drugs
- When I want to test my ability to control my use (I think I know when to stop)

To make a good time feel better

- To enjoy a special event more
- To enjoy being with my friends
- While I'm relaxing
- To reward myself

When I have problems in my relationships

- With my parents
- With my loved ones
- With my neighbourhood
- With my coworkers

If you stop to think about your patterns of behaviour, you might notice that there are some situations in which you are more likely to use drugs or alcohol. Here are some common examples. Check off any that apply to you:

- Getting paid (having money with me)
- Being in a certain neighbourhood
- After work or an appointment
- At the end of the day
- On weekends
- On days I don't go to work/therapy
- Seeing or using paraphernalia (pipes, spoons, needles, bottles/glasses)
- Seeing friends and associates who use
- Intimate relationships (going on dates)

Other situations:

Now that you have an idea of the times that are hardest for you to avoid substances, you can start to make a plan. The table below asks you to look at what your triggers are, how you have dealt with them in the past, and how you plan to deal with them differently.

Trigger/Situation	How do you feel physically/emotionally when this happens?	What do you do when this happens?	What could you do differently?
Argument with partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Angry and upset - Heart races - Can't sit down 	Have to get out of the house. Slam the door and go to the pub.	Go to another room and calm down. Think about why partner is upset. Talk to partner when calmed down.

ABC Data Sheet

This sheet will be used to recognize the activators and consequences that stem our behaviours.

Trigger/Situation	Activation	Behaviour	Consequences	Alternative/Balance
Bad day at work	Wife asks how my day was	I grab a beer out of the fridge and I chug it	Wife gets upset so we start to yell and get in a fight	Instead of grabbing a beer I should have told my wife about my bad day and then let it go.

SAFE COPING SKILLS

(From *Seeking Safety: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD and Substance Abuse*

By Lisa M. Najavits, Ph.D.)

1. **Ask for help** – Reach out to someone safe.
2. **Inspire yourself** – Carry something positive (e.g., poem) or negative (photo of a friend who overdosed).
3. **Leave a bad scene** – When things go wrong, get out.
4. **Persist** – Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never give up.
5. **Honesty** – Secrets and lying are at the core of substance abuse; honesty heals them.
6. **Cry** – Let yourself cry; it will not last forever.
7. **Choose self-respect** – Choose whatever will make you like yourself tomorrow.
8. **Take good care of your body** – Eat right, exercise, sleep, safe sex.
9. **List your options** – In any situation, you have choices.
10. **Creating meaning** – Remind yourself what you are living for: your children? Love? Truth? Justice? God?
11. **Do the best you can with what you have** – Make the most of available opportunities.
12. **Set a boundary** – Say “no” to protect yourself.
13. **Compassion** – Listen to yourself with respect and care.
14. **When in doubt, do what is hardest** – The most difficult path is invariably the right one.
15. **Talk yourself through it** – Self-talk helps in difficult times.
16. **Imagine** – Create a mental picture that helps you feel different (e.g., remember a safe place).
17. **Notice the choice point** – In slow motion, notice the exact moment when you chose a substance.
18. **Pace yourself** – If overwhelmed, go slower; if stagnant, go faster.
19. **Stay safe** – Do whatever you need to put your safety above all.

20. **Seek understanding, not blame** – Listen to your behaviour; blaming prevents growth.
21. **If one way does not work, try another** – As if in a maze, turn a corner and try a new path.
22. **Link trauma and substance abuse** – Recognize substances as an attempt to self medicate.
23. **Alone is better than a bad relationship** – If only people who are receiving help are safe for now, that is okay.
24. **Create a new story** – You are the author of your life; be the hero who overcomes adversity.
25. **Avoid avoidable suffering** – Prevent bad situations in advance.
26. **Ask others** – Ask others if your belief is accurate.
27. **Get organized** – You will feel more in control with lists, “to do’s” and a clean house.
28. **Watch for danger signs** – Face a problem before it becomes huge; notice red flags.
29. **Healing above all** – Focus on what matters.
30. **Try something, anything** – A good plan today is better than a perfect one tomorrow.
31. **Discovery** – Find out whether your assumption is true rather than staying “in your head”.
32. **Attend treatment** – AA, self-help, therapy, medications, groups – anything that keeps you going.
33. **Create a buffer** – Put something between you and danger (e.g., time, distance).
34. **Say what you really think** – You will feel closer to others (but only do this with safe people).
35. **Listen to your needs** – No more neglect – really hear what you need.
36. **Move toward your opposite** – For example, if you are too dependent, try being more independent.
37. **Replay the scene** – Review a negative event; what can you do differently next time?
38. **Notice the cost** – What is the price of substance abuse in your life?
39. **Structure your day** – A productive schedule keeps you on track and connected to the world.
40. **Set an action plan** – Be specific, set a deadline, and let others know about it.

41. **Protect yourself** - Put up a shield against destructive people, bad environments and substances.
42. **Soothing talk** – Talk to yourself very gently (as if to a friend or small child).
43. **Think of the consequences** – Really see the impact for tomorrow, next week, next year.
44. **Trust the process** – Just keep moving forward; the only way out is through.
45. **Work the material** – The more you practice and participate, the quicker the healing.
46. **Integrate the split self** – Accept all sides of yourself- they are there for a reason.
47. **Expect growth to feel uncomfortable** – If it feels awkward or difficult, you're doing it right.
48. **Replace destructive activities** – eat candy instead of getting high.
49. **Pretend you like yourself** – See how different the day feels.
50. **Focus on now** – Do what you can to make today better; do not get overwhelmed by the past or future.
51. **Praise yourself** – Notice what you did right; this is the most powerful method of growth.
52. **Observe repeating patterns** – Try to notice and understand your re-enactments.
53. **Self-nurture** – Do something that you enjoy (e.g., take a walk, see a movie).
54. **Practice delay** – If you cannot totally prevent a self-destructive act, at least delay it as long as possible.
55. **Let go of destructive relationships** – If it cannot be fixed, detach.
56. **Take responsibility** – Take an active, not a passive, approach.
57. **Set a deadline** – Make it happen by setting a date.
58. **Make a commitment** – Promise yourself to do what is right to help your recovery.
59. **Rethink** – Think in a way that helps you feel better.
60. **Detach from emotional pain (grounding)** – Distract, walk away, change the channel.
61. **Learn from experience** – Seek wisdom that can help you next time.

62. **Solve the problem** – Don't take it personally when things go wrong – try to just seek a solution.
63. **Use kinder language** – Make your language less harsh.
64. **Examine the evidence** – Evaluate both sides of the picture.
65. **Plan it out** – Take the time to think ahead – it is the opposite of impulsivity.
66. **Identify the belief** – For example, shoulds, deprivation reasoning.
67. **Reward yourself** – Find a healthy way to celebrate anything you do right.
68. **Create new “tapes”** – Literally! Take a tape recorder and record a new way of thinking to play back.
69. **Find rules to live by** – Remember a phrase that works for you (e.g., “Stay real”).
70. **Setbacks are not failures** – A setback is just a setback, nothing more.
71. **Tolerate the feeling** – “No feeling is final”, just get through it safely.
72. **Actions first and feelings will follow** – Do not wait until you feel motivated; just start now.
73. **Create positive addictions** – Sports, hobbies, AA...
74. **When in doubt, don't** – If you suspect danger, stay away.
75. **Fight the trigger** – Take an active approach to protect yourself.
76. **Notice the source** – Before you accept criticism or advice, notice who is telling it to you.
77. **Make a decision** – If you are stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now; do not wait.
78. **Do the right thing** – Do what you know will help you, even if you don't feel like it.
79. **Go to a meeting** – Feet first; just get there and let the rest happen.
80. **Protect your body from HIV** – This is truly a life-or-death issue.
81. **Prioritize healing** – Make healing your most urgent and important goal, above all else.

82. **Reach for community resources** – Lean on them! They can be a source of great support.

83. **Get others to support your recovery** – Tell people what you need.

84. **Notice what you can control** – List the aspects of your life you do control (e.g., job, friends...)