

Cravings & Urge Surfing in Recovery

Understanding urges as time-limited experiences that can be observed without automatically acting on them.

What a craving is

Cravings can include thoughts, body sensations, memories, images, urges, or emotional pressure. They may be triggered by people, places, stress, celebration, boredom, conflict, money, fatigue, or learned routines.

Urge surfing

- Notice where the urge shows up in the body.
- Rate intensity from 0-10.
- Observe the urge as a wave that rises, peaks, and changes.
- Delay action while changing context, contacting support, or using a coping skill.
- Re-rate the urge after 10-20 minutes rather than assuming the first intensity will stay constant.

Reduce risk

- Leave high-risk environments.
- Contact recovery or social support early rather than after the urge becomes overwhelming.
- Eat, sleep, and hydrate consistently.
- Remove easy access to substances when possible.
- Use medication for substance use disorders when prescribed and appropriate.

Try this reflection

What are your three most predictable craving triggers, and what is the first protective action for each?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.