



COPING WITH CRAVINGS – SMOKING

1. MANAGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT – This is the most important piece to the puzzle when it comes to coping with cravings because it is the most proactive and practical strategy. Planning ahead to avoid aspects of your environment that can trigger cravings is perhaps the most effective thing that you can do in order to decrease the frequency of experiencing cravings. When it comes to smoking there are many practical ways you can manage your environment. Making your home cigarette-free would be an example of setting up environmental controls for smoking cessation. Or if you are still cutting down and smoking in the car is a problem, then put your cigarettes in the trunk when driving. There are many easy and practical ways to put some distance between you and your next potential cigarette.
2. SEE IT THROUGH TO THE END- When thinking about having a cigarette do not neglect to consider how you will feel after your cigarette is done and gone. Think about the displeasure you will feel if you have been trying to quit. Think about how you will wish you had done something else instead of smoking. Think about how you may have disappointed others who were counting on you to quit (like children and family for example). Always remember that giving in to the craving now will only make it harder in the long run. Sometimes giving in feel something like knocking down a house of cards that you painstakingly took the time to slowly build, card by card. If you can just learn to remember some of the feelings associated with giving in and smoking you can become more determined not to feel that way again by instead learning to cope with cravings
3. DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES:
 - Change the Channel – Mentally, that is- just push the cravings right out of your mind by thinking of something else. Get up and do something else. Try hard to think about something that requires your focus and distracts you from your craving, even if only for a little while. Your mind will likely keep changing back but keep changing the mental channel until you ride out the craving
 - Use the Phone – Get on the phone quickly with a supportive person who can help you ride out the craving. Try to find a helper beforehand that you can call that you know will say just the right things to help you avoid giving in to cravings
 - Alternate Activities – Free time is deadly with cravings. Get out and do something safe.
 - Reverse Tomorrow Trap – Remember when you were smoking and you kept that up by promising yourself “I’ll quit tomorrow” day after day? Well, in this case, now that you are *not smoking*, just do the opposite by telling yourself that you will wait until tomorrow to have a cigarette instead of smoking and giving in right now today. (The idea of course is to wake up tomorrow and do the same thing by continuously pushing off the idea of giving in to your cravings, very similar to the “One Day at a Time” concept that is so effective in the 12 Step model (Alcoholics Anonymous)



4. PREPARE AND PRACTICE EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL SELF-CARE:

- ”Riding the Wave” – Remember that cravings usually come in waves that initially build in intensity but gradually subside if you are able to just patiently try to ride out the wave
- Reward Yourself - When you make it through a tough time without smoking, do something nice for yourself. Use the money you saved from not buying tobacco products
- Prayer – (If applicable for you based on your beliefs) Pray for the strength and the desire to be able to successfully ride out the craving.
- Emphasize the Positive – Think about the good things about not smoking, as there are so many. Remember why you stopped in the first place. Think about how proud you are that you have made it this far. Remember that if you can survive this craving, which shall pass, things will get better with time. Think about how grateful and healthy that you will feel if you don’t give in to the craving
- Get Moving - Physical activity and exercise can be great for both preventing cravings (if done beforehand) as well as a way to divert current cravings by getting up and doing something active like taking a walk or a run to escape a period of cravings. Fresh air can be helpful
- Reflect and Redirect Negative Thoughts - This can take practice. Sometimes a craving is accompanied by negative thoughts such as “what’s the point, this is just too hard” or “I can get away with a few more puffs just this once” or “I’ll try harder tomorrow”. These are all lies we tell ourselves to give ourselves permission to give in to a craving. Before giving in, take time to think about the much more positive truth instead of these mind tricks. For example tell yourself “There is a point to me enduring all of this, it’s for the best in the end” or “If I give in today, it is likely I will give in tomorrow too”, “I can’t afford to give in even just this once” or “There is no sense pushing off to tomorrow what I need to do today, right now” “I can’t give up now” and “This will get easier with time if I can just stick with it” Think about how you personally need to stay positive
- Care for Your Feelings – Sometimes a craving is just a craving and there may be no identifiable reason for it. Other times, however, cravings can be triggered by feelings or mood states. If you are able to recognize that the reason that you may be having a craving is actually a response to an uncomfortable feeling or mood state, then instead of giving in to the craving to soothe your feelings, use your other positive coping skills for your feelings (talk to a helper, relaxation, stress management, anger management, etc.). For smoking, stress and anxiety are common triggers so learn some alternate coping skills as soon as you can

5. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) and other “Quit-Smoking” Medications – Study after study has proven the effectiveness of medications for smoking cessation as well as forms of nicotine replacement. Look into your options as NRT and medication may be the extra piece to the puzzle that can help you successfully quit



One effective way to utilize this coping with cravings skills list is as follows:

1. Everyone should automatically be working on the first item: *Managing your environment*. Come up with some specific ideas and strategies to manage your home, work, social and recreational environment to help increase your chances of avoiding cigarette cravings and sustaining abstinence
2. Next go through the skills list and decide which will be your primary skill for coping with cravings. What is going to be your #1 –“Go-to” strategy for coping with cravings for cigarettes
3. Finally go through the list and pick a secondary skill to use if the primary skill is unavailable or is not working. This secondary skill may need to be quite different than the primary skill to serve as a “safety net” when the first one just isn’t helping you push past the craving like it’s supposed to.

Discuss your plan for managing cravings based on your answers above