

Self-help strategies for quitting drinking and/or drugs

If you want to quit drinking/drugs, the strategies below can be helpful, and you can add your own at the end. Check off two or three to try in the next week or two.

- Find alternatives.** If drinking or drug use has occupied a lot of your time, then fill free time by developing new, healthy activities, hobbies, and relationships, or renewing ones you've missed. If you have counted on alcohol/drugs to be more comfortable in social situations, manage moods, or cope with problems, then seek other, healthy ways to deal with those areas of your life.
- Avoid "triggers."** What triggers your urge to drink or use drugs? If certain people or places make you drink or use drugs even when you don't want to, try to avoid them. If certain activities, times of day, or feelings trigger the urge, plan something else to do instead of drinking or using drugs. If drinking or using drugs at home is a problem, keep no alcohol or drugs there.
- Plan to handle urges.** When you cannot avoid a trigger and an urge hits, consider these options: Remind yourself of your reasons for changing (it can help to carry them in writing or store them in an electronic message you can access easily). Or talk things through with someone you trust. Or get involved with a healthy, distracting activity, such as physical exercise or a hobby that doesn't involve drinking or using drugs. Or, instead of fighting the feeling, accept it and ride it out without giving in, knowing that it will soon crest like a wave and pass.
- Know your "no."** You're likely to be offered a drink or drugs at times when you don't want one. Have a polite, convincing "no, thanks" ready. The faster you can say no to these offers, the less likely you are to give in. If you hesitate, it allows you time to think of excuses to go along.

My Own Strategies:

1.
2.
3.

Handling urges to drink or use drugs

Plan ahead to stay in control

As you change your drinking/using drugs, it's normal and common to have urges or a craving for alcohol and drugs. The words "urge" and "craving" refer to a broad range of thoughts, physical sensations, or emotions that tempt you to drink or use drugs, even though you have at least some desire not to. You may feel an uncomfortable pull in two directions or sense a loss of control.

Fortunately, urges to drink/use drugs are short-lived, predictable, and controllable. This short module offers a *recognize-avoid-cope* approach commonly used in cognitive behavioral therapy, which helps people to change unhelpful thinking patterns and reactions. It also provides worksheets to help you uncover the nature of your urges to drink or use drugs and to make a plan for handling them.

With time, and by practicing new responses, you'll find that your urges to drink or use drugs will lose strength, and you'll gain confidence in your ability to deal with urges that may still arise at times. If you are having a very difficult time with urges, or do not make progress with the strategies in this module after a few weeks, then consult a doctor or therapist for support. In addition, some new, non-habit forming medications can reduce the desire to drink or lessen the rewarding effect of drinking so it is easier to stop.

Recognize two types of "triggers"

An urge to drink or use drugs can be set off by external triggers in the environment and internal ones within yourself.

- **External triggers** are people, places, things, or times of day that offer drinking opportunities or remind you of drinking or using drugs. These "**high-risk situations**" are more obvious, predictable, and avoidable than internal triggers.
- **Internal triggers** can be puzzling because the urge to drink or use drugs just seems to "pop up." But if you pause to think about it when it happens, you'll find that the urge may have been set off by a fleeting thought, a positive emotion such as excitement, a negative emotion such as frustration, or a physical sensation such as a headache, tension, or nervousness.

Consider tracking and analyzing your urges to drink or use drugs for a couple of weeks. This will help you become more aware of when and how you experience urges, what triggers them, and ways to avoid or control them.

Avoid high-risk situations

In many cases, your best strategy will be to avoid taking the chance that you'll have an urge, then slip and drink or use drugs. At home, keep no alcohol or drugs. Socially, avoid activities involving drinking or using drugs. If you feel guilty about turning down an invitation, remind yourself that you are not necessarily talking about "forever." When the urges subside or become more manageable, you may decide to ease gradually into some situations you now choose to avoid. In the meantime, you can stay connected with friends by suggesting alternate activities that don't involve drinking or drugs.

Cope with triggers you can't avoid

It's not possible to avoid all high-risk situations or to block internal triggers, so you'll need a range of strategies to handle urges to drink or using drugs. Here are some options:

- **Remind yourself** of your reasons for making a change. Carry your top reasons on a wallet card or in an electronic message that you can access easily, such as a mobile phone notepad entry or a saved email.
- **Talk it through** with someone you trust. Have a trusted friend on standby for a phone call, or bring one along to high-risk situations.
- **Distract yourself** with a healthy, alternative activity. For different situations, come up with engaging short, mid-range, and longer options, like texting or calling someone, watching short online videos, lifting weights to music, showering, meditating, taking a walk, or doing a hobby.
- **Challenge the thought** that drives the urge. Stop it, analyze the error in it, and replace it. Example: "It couldn't hurt to have one little drink. WAIT a minute—what am I thinking? One *could* hurt, as I've seen 'just one' lead to lots more. I am sticking with my choice not to drink or use drugs."
- **Ride it out** without giving in. Instead of fighting an urge, accept it as normal and temporary. As you ride it out, keep in mind that it will soon crest like an ocean wave and pass.
- **Leave** high-risk situations quickly and gracefully. It helps to plan your escape in advance.

Visit Websites:

<http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov>
<http://www.samhsa.gov>