

Triggers and Cravings

What is a craving?

A craving is a strong urge or desire to get high or use a substance.

Cravings can be experienced as thoughts (usually about using), physical sensations (such as sweating palms, pounding heart, tastes or smells, shakiness) and action urges.

Cravings can be of different intensity: mild, strong, or anywhere in between.

Cravings can cause emotional reactions: they can make you feel irritable, anxious, excited or out of control.

A craving comes and goes like a wave. The average craving only lasts fifteen minutes. If you do not act on a craving it will go away.

What does a craving feel like for you?

What is a trigger?

A trigger is anything that starts a craving. Anything associated with drug use can be a trigger.

Triggers can be **external**: people, places and things are external triggers.

Triggers can be **internal**: feelings, thoughts and sensations are internal triggers.

Triggers can be **situational**: situations (“It’s Friday night!” “My mother-in-law is coming to visit,”) can also trigger cravings and urges to use.

What are your internal, external and situational triggers?

Dealing with triggers

The first step in dealing with triggers is to **identify** them. If you don’t know what your triggers are, you are likely to be ambushed by them.

Once you know what your triggers are, you have to figure out how to **avoid** them.

Some triggers can't be avoided. Friday night comes around once a week, no matter what you do. Some triggers need to be **interrupted**. We interrupt triggers by surrounding them with healthy activities that keep our minds focused on positive steps towards our life goals.

Sometimes we can **defuse** triggers by talking about them.

If you tolerate triggers over time, without acting on them, they may stop being triggers for you.