

PATIENT HANDOUT. Please feel free to copy and distribute this page.



# Cutting Back and Coping With Cravings or Urges to Drink

Fill out this worksheet when you are not having a craving or urge to drink, and refer to it as needed to help you meet your goal around alcohol. Talk to a friend, counsellor, or your primary care clinician for help with any of the questions.

**My goals around alcohol (example goals: to quit, to drink less, to drink on fewer days):**

**Reasons I want to stop drinking or drink less:**

## Tips to Cut Back

**Check off those you think you can do:**

- Space out the time between drinks and drink a non-alcoholic beverage in between
- Change from your favourite alcoholic drink to one you don't like as much
- Avoid rewarding yourself with alcohol
- Eat while you drink
- Make weaker drinks (if you drink hard liquor) or drink smaller cans/bottles of beer
- Create a schedule: gradually cut back each day, then each week until you reach your goal
- Keep alcohol out of the house

## What to do if you have a craving:

Cravings are temporary and will go away on their own, usually within 20 minutes. Having a plan of what to do when a craving comes up can help you stick to your plan to drink less or quit alcohol.

• **The 4 Ds:**

- **Delay:** Set a manageable time limit to delay acting on the craving. *I will delay for \_\_\_\_ (write down the number of minutes—e.g., 5, 10, 20 minutes).*
- **Distract:** During this delay period, do something that will occupy your thoughts and grab your attention easily. *(Example distractions: do some physical activity, go for a walk, engage in a hobby or craft, listen to music, play word puzzles or a game, call a friend or sponsor.)*
- **Drink water:** Getting rid of thirst can send signals to our brain that reduce cravings.
- **Decide:** After the set time delay, decide not to drink. Remind yourself of why you don't want to drink, even if the craving is still there and feels compelling.

- **The Urge Surfing Technique:** Imagine your cravings are like an ocean wave where you are going up and down the wave on a surfboard without being submerged by the cravings.

**What are your triggers for drinking? What can you do to avoid or cope with these?**

**List some things you can do to distract yourself and how long you will do them for:**

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**Sources: 1)** Spithoff S, Kahan M. Primary care management of alcohol use disorder and at-risk drinking: part 2: counsel, prescribe, connect. *Can Fam Physician*. 2015;61:515-21; **2)** RxFiles. Questions about cutting back on alcohol and the answers that may surprise you. 2023; <https://www.rxfiles.ca/rxfiles/uploads/documents/alcohol-patient-booklet.pdf>; **3)** Cognitive behaviour therapy resources. <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>.



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