

# **Cravings Don't Cause Relapse: Learn to Manage Your Cravings to Prevent Addiction Relapse**

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Cravings don't cause relapse. If cravings were the sole trigger for relapse among individuals in recovery from alcohol or drug addiction, attaining long-term sobriety would be an unattainable goal. However, cravings are a common and expected occurrence in the recovery process. A "craving" or an "urge" represents a strong desire to alter one's mood or to use alcohol or other mood-altering drugs.

While cravings are prevalent during the early stages of abstinence and often intensify during detoxification, they can persist over time or resurface periodically. These cravings are centered on a perceived need for the chemical in the face of physical symptoms and detox symptoms such as shakes, rapid heartbeat, and accelerated breathing, along with psychological need for relief of anxiety, stress, restlessness, and other uncomfortable feelings. Defense mechanisms justify using the substances while being aware of the problems they cause.

Denial, a prime example of such a defense mechanism, distorts reality, enabling the individual to continue using without fully acknowledging the extent of their addiction.

Examples of common defense mechanisms, including denial, coupled with ambivalent feelings about quitting, might manifest as statements such as: "I can quit tomorrow; I don't need to do this," "I'll use just a little bit and not get intoxicated," "It's my business alone," "I don't have a problem," "Just a little to ease the tension," or "Nobody will notice." Persistent obsessive thoughts about the substance, coupled with psychological

defense mechanisms and uncertainty about quitting, can create a dangerous combination.

Perceptual and psychological cues can trigger cravings. Perceptual cues may arise from intentionally or unintentionally encountering old acquaintances who use substances, revisiting familiar locations associated with substance use, or encountering scents or music reminiscent of past substance use experiences. Psychological cues often stem from uncomfortable emotional states, such as anger, frustration, restlessness, boredom, or loneliness, prompting recollections of using substances to alleviate these feelings, if only temporarily.

It's crucial to understand that cravings, while intense, are not synonymous with relapse. Experiencing cravings does not mandate substance use. Cravings are manageable and temporary. By resisting the siren's song of cravings and refraining from substance use, they gradually diminish over time. With consistent practice of abstinence skills to combat cravings, their intensity and frequency diminish.

While cravings are a common aspect of the recovery process for individuals battling addiction, they do not inevitably lead to relapse. By practicing abstinence skills, individuals can effectively manage cravings, allowing them to diminish in intensity and frequency over time, thereby preventing relapse and supporting long-term sobriety. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**

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