

Top 10 Craving Management Tools That People With Addiction Should Use to Not Take The First One

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Early steps of addiction recovery focus on breaking the cycle of drinking or drug use. Interrupting the momentum of addiction can occur in various ways. It might be prompted by waking up after a night of heavy drinking and drug use, facing a hangover, and realizing the need for change. Alternatively, it could stem from a deliberate, well-considered decision to quit drinking, starting from that moment onward. In more severe cases, it might take a dire warning from a medical professional, such as waking up in a hospital bed with a doctor emphasizing the imperative to stop or face fatal consequences. Various circumstances can influence this decision to quit. Following a period of abstinence, whether due to sleep, incarceration, or other interruptions, the decision to abstain from that first drink or drug becomes the next crucial step in breaking the cycle of addiction.

Depending on the level of severity of someone's substance use disorder, even a brief period of abstinence can involve detox or withdrawal symptoms, which can trigger intense cravings and make staying abstinent difficult. These cravings are a part of how people with substance use disorder develop a loss of control over their substance use. Once the chemical is consumed, someone with addiction does not know (with confidence) what will happen next. Their ability to control their consumption, their impairment, and the consequences of their behavior is largely outside their control. Therefore, establishing abstinence by not taking the first drink or drug is paramount. To resist that temptation and to achieve abstinence, consider these strategies:

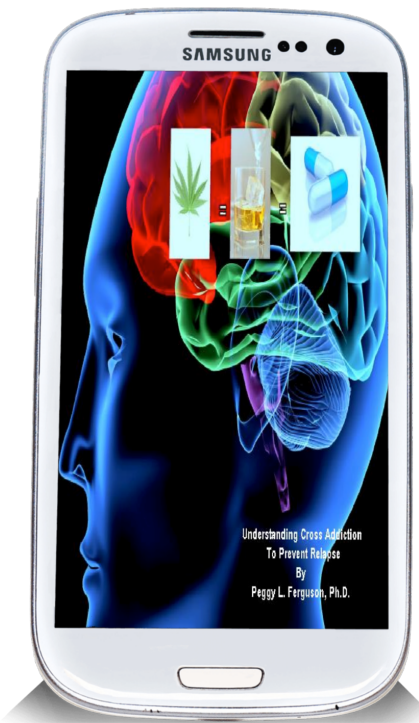
1. **Acknowledge Cravings:** Understand that cravings are a normal response to withdrawal and detox. Cravings are a part of the addiction

cycle. Remind yourself that these are temporary conditions. With time, cravings diminish in frequency and intensity. They also tend to be short-lived; delaying use for a few minutes often leads to their subsidence.

2. **Identify Triggers:** Recognize the cues or triggers that prompt cravings. Have environmental or emotional factors recently triggered your desire to use? Avoid these triggers to be able to prevent cravings. Resist cravings by finding alternative coping mechanisms.
3. **Challenge Beliefs:** Evaluate the positive outcomes you expect from using drugs or alcohol. Challenge the belief that the substance will fulfill these expectations. Reflect on whether the substance still serves your needs and the negative consequences it has caused. Be honest with yourself about its actual effects.
4. **Emotional Awareness:** When facing emotional triggers, identify the emotions or stressors involved. Explore alternative ways of managing these feelings and practice new coping skills.
5. **Visual Reminders:** Remind yourself of your motivation for quitting. Place notes around your home and car, reminding yourself why you stop drinking or using.
6. **Distraction Techniques:** Engage in activities that occupy your mind and body to distract from cravings. Allow the craving to pass without giving in to it.
7. **Challenge Distorted Thinking:** Identify and challenge thoughts that rationalize relapse. Recognize these cognitive distortions as falsehoods that justify returning to substance use.
8. **Seek Support:** Reach out to others for help when experiencing cravings. Contact someone from AA/NA, a supportive family member, or your sponsor to discuss your cravings and reaffirm your commitment to sobriety.

9. Spiritual Practices: Use spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, or reciting the Serenity Prayer. Express gratitude for your progress in recovery.
10. Thought-stopping techniques: Employ methods like visualizing a stop sign or saying "stop!" when intrusive thoughts arise. Replace positive memories of substance use with realistic assessments of your current situation. Engage in grounding exercises, such as observing your surroundings, using relaxation breathing, or calling someone.

Use the recovery worksheets on the [Addiction Recovery Worksheets](#) page. By incorporating these tools, with the help and support of others, you can interrupt the momentum of addiction and make your way into your recovery journey, where you can strengthen and maintain your commitment to sobriety and rebuild your life. **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.



“Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse” By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Craving management tools can help you establish a foundation for abstinence and recovery. However, managing cravings is one of many parts of the broader recovery journey. Understanding and addressing other underlying issues contributing to addiction, such as cross-addiction, is equally critical.

Cross addiction, or the tendency to replace one addictive behavior with another, poses a significant risk to long-term sobriety. Recognize how interconnected these concepts are as you build on practical cravings management strategies to develop a deeper understanding of addiction recovery.

"Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse," an ebook, is an invaluable resource for understanding the psychological and brain mechanisms behind cross-addiction. It offers insights and strategies to identify and address these patterns before they jeopardize your recovery. It equips you with the necessary skills to build a robust and resilient recovery.

\$9.95

This is a digital download, available immediately.