

Controlling Your Urges

Objective: To identify your urges and their triggers, and to identify the positive and negative consequences of your urges.

You Should Know

Whether you are trying to control your eating, your alcohol use, your gambling, or other self-defeating behaviors that you have adopted to cope, you already know that it is much more than a matter of willpower.

When you have an urge to do something, even if it is something that you know is self-destructive, the pleasure centers in your brain take a shortcut past the thinking part of your brain (the neocortex) and send a “do it now” signal to the parts of your brain that control your actions. This happens in a split second.

What to Do

You can control your urges and resist temptations by activating the thinking part of your brain. When you do this repeatedly, it becomes a habit, and eventually you will find that you are able to resist temptation to do things that are self-defeating and harmful.

Preparation can help. Here are a few ideas to begin to control your urges:

- Avoid situations or things that trigger your cravings.
- When you feel you are going to be overwhelmed by your urges, call or text someone.
- Remove temptations from your home.
- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes every day.
- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet.
- Practice meditation or deep breathing and relaxation techniques.

Think Before You Act

Complete this worksheet when you feel the urge to do something that you know is self-defeating or harmful.

Date: _____ Time: _____

Describe your urge.

What has triggered this urge?

What will be the negative consequences of giving in to this urge?

What will be the positive consequences of controlling your urges?

What can you do instead of giving in to your urges?

Who can you call or contact who can offer you support?

Rate your urges from 1 to 10, where 1 = My urges are gone, and
10 = My urges are still as strong as ever. _____