

5 Easy Tools to Resist the Urge of Bad Habits

Learning tools from substance use treatment can help us all make better choices

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Urge control is a common term brought up in [addiction](#)-focused treatment where people are encouraged to manage the waves of urges that come and go. Some urges or cravings to use may feel like they last a lifetime, but in reality, they're often much shorter and are often related to specific triggers that occur. Urges last approximately 15 minutes and if you pay [attention](#), they will be gone before you even know it.

When talking about an urge lasting only 15 minutes, the most logical treatment is to put off using when you first get the urge. However, it takes knowledge and patience that the urge can and will go away. We often call this urge surfing. See the urge rise on the wave and then ride the wave all the way through until the urge is gone.

Urges don't just come in the form of addictions though. Urges also come in the form of mental habits and reactions. The urge to react in the same way we have in the past. The urge to lash out in [anger](#). The urge to live from the most childish part of ourselves rather than the most matured adult part of ourselves.

We all have these urges that push us in the most difficult moments to react in the same ways we have in the past. But as it's been said, if you do what you've always done, you're going to get what you've always gotten. So with that, there are 5 strategies used to help us deal with these urges. We call them DEADS:

Delay

Escape

Avoid

Distract

Substitute

Delay means to just put off reacting, using, or giving into the craving for a bit of time and know that the urge will go away. That strong emotion will go away. Even if you can delay for 5-10 minutes that may change the experience you have with the emotion and thus make you better able to handle it. Because how often have we all said something in anger that we then later regretted?

Escape means removing yourself from the situation that is triggering you. Leave the argument. Take a pause. Excuse yourself from the house with [alcohol](#) knowing that you can't be around that. And related to this, **avoid** situations that you know can be triggering. If you regularly go to places that remind you of using (e.g. clubs, friends houses, etc.) then avoid going to them in the first place. And even if you do again, you can always escape.

Distract means that you can take control of the urge by getting busy. Don't just sit there and ruminate

on the urge, but put your focus in something else. For some people that may be art work, for some people it could be just watching TV, reading a book, walking, showering, or exercising, which can be particularly helpful if you're triggered into anger. Put something else in your life to distract yourself of those things that can be triggering.

Lastly, **substitute** your behavior. If you're having issues with anger, substitute in a walk as your new behavior. If you're having issues with substance use, change your behavior so that when you get a craving to smoke a cigarette, pick up a piece of fruit or vegetable. Although a carrot or celery stick may not give you the same effect, it still helps you take care of that habit of simply having something to put in your mouth. You could also use a toothpick or straw. The trick is to come up with something that can be easily substituted in.

I use examples of these strategies for a numerous things because whether our drug of choice is alcohol or anger, these tools can be useful. We all have some habit we're trying to change and it's never easy. As Gandhi once said,

“We cannot, in a moment, get rid of habits of a lifetime.”

So we have to remember that it's a practice to continue to choose strategies that help us make new habits that are healthier for us and create relationships we want.

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