

Controlling Your Urges

Controlling your urges can be very difficult for most of us. Whether you are trying to control your eating, your alcohol use, your gambling, or other self-defeating behaviors, you already know that it is much more than just 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 short-cut 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. All this happens in a split second.

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

A little preparation will help:

- Stay away from situations or things that trigger your cravings.
- When you feel you are going to be overwhelmed by your urges, call someone and talk it out.
- Remove temptations from your home.
- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise every day for at least ½ hour.
- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet.
- Use deep breathing and relaxation techniques when you start thinking about your urges.

The worksheet on the next page can also help. Make copies of this worksheet and keep them handy so you can fill one out each time you feel yourself losing self-control.

Controlling Your Urges: Think Before You Act

Directions: Fill in 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 that can give you support to control your urges?

Rate your urges after filling in this worksheet from 1 to 10, with 1=My urges are gone, and 10=My urges are still as strong as ever.
