

Craving Control

A craving is an intense desire and while there are healthy cravings, the ones that are involved in addiction are detrimental to your life, health and goals. Cravings get “stuck” in the brain. Areas of the brain that are involved in pleasure motivate you to seek out that which you crave and can literally hijack your brain.

- The prefrontal cortex is designed to be the brakes of the brain.
- The nucleus accumbens (part of the basal ganglia) is very responsive to dopamine and other pleasure chemicals.
- The limbic brain stores highly charged emotional memories which can become triggers for giving in to cravings.

HALT – Don’t get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired

- If your blood sugar gets too low and you are hungry, you are vulnerable to making a bad decision.
- If negative emotions take over, your limbic brain becomes more active and your PFC activity decreases.
- If you get too lonely and isolated, you are vulnerable to cravings.
- If you get too tired, you won’t be able to make good decisions.

To get control of cravings you need to have a balanced brain

- Meditation
- Hypnosis
- Stress Management
- Engage in brain-healthy habits: Eat a good diet, exercise, learn new things, get good sleep and avoid things that are harmful to your brain like drinking, smoking and eating junk food.
- Get your vitamin D level checked and optimized to be between 50 and 100. When vitamin D levels are low, the hormone leptin (which tells your brain when to stop eating) doesn’t work.
- Take enough fish oil so it helps to get your mood and cravings under control.
- Stabilize your blood sugar. Low blood sugar decreases blood flow in the brain leaving you vulnerable to making bad decisions.
 - Don’t skip breakfast.
 - Eat more small meals throughout the day (five to six) rather than three big ones in order to keep your blood sugar stable.
 - Avoid artificial sweeteners (the natural sweetener stevia is OK).
 - Avoid sugar because it doesn’t serve you in a good way and it increases erratic brain cell firing and inflammation in the body. Alcohol also raises your blood sugar.
 - Avoid sugar for 2 weeks and your craving for it will dissipate and you will feel in control.
 - Supplements that support the reduction of cravings, including n-acetylcysteine and others found in Craving Control at BrainMD.

Address possible food allergies

For example, if you are allergic to milk or wheat but consume them anyway, blood flow in your brain will decrease. IgG blood testing (delayed food sensitivity testing), or an elimination diet can be helpful in identifying your food intolerances.

Be aware of environmental triggers and create a plan for how you will deal with them.

Identify the people, places and things that trigger your addiction cravings.

Draw three big circles on a piece of paper and write the following in each circle:

- Green circle: What behaviors are keeping you safe and free from cravings?
- Yellow circle: When are you vulnerable to your cravings?
- Red circle: What/where are your danger points?

The Fork in the Road Exercise

1. If you continue down the road you are currently on with your addiction, what does that get you? Write down all the harmful things along this road that are impairing your life. What are you giving up? Ask yourself, is this what I really want?
2. At the other fork, think about what your life will be like without the addiction. Write down how you will feel about yourself. Do you like your improved appearance and health? Have you found work you love? Have healthier relationships? Have you stopped wasting money on things that don't serve you?

Practice willpower

The brain creates tracts with repeated behaviors. Every time you give into a craving it strengthens the craving in the brain. On the other hand, every time you say “no” you create new connections in the PFC that will help your “brakes” work better. The more you say “no” the easier it is to say “no.” You will feel empowered by the level of control you develop.

Retraining the brain takes about 70 days, so keeping a journal can be very helpful.