

SOBER SURVIVAL GUIDE

FOR CRAVINGS

A quick-reference guide with practical things to do when cravings hit — whatever stage of the journey you are on.

LifeAndSobriety.com

3–5

MINUTES

How long most cravings last

90%

PASS ON THEIR OWN

Ride it out — it will go

100%

OF THE TIME

You have survived every one

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- 01 · Understand What's Happening — the science behind cravings
- 02 · The First 5 Minutes — immediate actions when a craving hits hard
- 03 · Your Craving Survival Toolkit — mental, physical, connection & distraction tools
- 04 · Know Your Triggers — the HALTSB framework explained
- 05 · Power Mantras — words to say when you need them most
- 06 · Quick Reference Card — your 6-step craving action plan

UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING

A craving is not a command. It is a wave — it builds, peaks, and passes. Understanding what is happening in your body and mind takes away some of its power. Knowledge is one of your greatest tools in recovery.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING	A CRAVING IS NOT
<p>Your brain is requesting a familiar chemical reward it once associated with relief or escape from pain.</p>	<p>✗ A sign that you are failing</p>
<p>It feels urgent because your brain has learned to treat it as a survival signal — but it is not one.</p>	<p>✗ Proof that recovery is not working</p>
<p>It is temporary even when it feels permanent. Most cravings peak and pass within 3–5 minutes.</p>	<p>✗ Something you cannot survive</p>
<p>It will pass whether you act on it or not. Every single time. That is a biological fact.</p>	<p>✗ A reason to give up on yourself</p>
<p>It gets weaker each time you choose not to act on it. Every craving you outlast trains your brain.</p>	<p>✗ A reflection of your character</p>
	<p>✗ Stronger than your willpower</p>
	<p>✗ An emergency requiring immediate action</p>

THE WAVE TECHNIQUE — SURF IT, DON'T FIGHT IT

Picture your craving as an ocean wave. It rises, it crests, and it crashes. Your job is not to fight the wave — fighting it only makes it feel bigger. Your job is simply to **surf it**. Notice it without judgment. Name it out loud. Let it move through you without acting on it. Breathe.

"This is a craving. It is not an emergency. It will peak and pass. I have ridden this wave before, and I will ride it again. I am stronger than this feeling."

THE FIRST 5 MINUTES — IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

When a craving hits hard, your only goal for the first five minutes is simple: **buy yourself time**. Cravings peak and pass — you just need to get through the next few minutes. Use any of these strategies right now.

ICE

Hold Ice or Cold Water

Fill a glass with ice water and hold it in both hands. The cold sensation immediately interrupts the craving signal in your brain and brings you back into your body. Simple, fast, and surprisingly effective.

4x4

Box Breathing — 4 Counts

Breathe IN for 4 · Hold for 4 · OUT for 4 · Hold for 4. Repeat 4 times. This activates your parasympathetic nervous system — your body's built-in calm response — within seconds.

MOVE

Move Your Body — Right Now

10 jumping jacks. A brisk walk around the block. Up and down the stairs twice. Physical movement shifts your brain chemistry within minutes and gives the craving energy somewhere to go.

CALL

Call or Text Someone

Text "craving" to your sponsor, a friend, or your support person. You don't even have to talk — just reaching out breaks the isolation that feeds cravings. Connection is medicine.

WAIT

Set a 10-Minute Timer

Tell yourself: "I just need to get through the next 10 minutes." When the timer goes off, reset if you need to. Cravings rarely survive multiple rounds of this strategy.

OUT

Change Your Environment

Leave the room. Step outside. Go somewhere different. A physical change of scene interrupts the craving trigger cycle and breaks the mental loop keeping you stuck.

Remember: You only need to survive the next 5 minutes. Then the next 5. That is how this works — one small window of time at a time.

YOUR CRAVING SURVIVAL TOOLKIT

Build your personal toolkit by identifying what works best for YOU. Different cravings call for different tools — emotional cravings respond to connection, physical restlessness responds to movement, mental spirals respond to distraction. Experiment and find your go-to combination.

MENTAL TOOLS — For when your mind won't stop

- Play the tape forward — visualize the full consequence of giving in, not just the first moment
- Recall your WHY — why did you originally choose sobriety? Go back to that moment
- Count your sober days — remind yourself exactly what is at stake right now
- Repeat a mantra out loud: "This too shall pass" or "I am stronger than this feeling"
- Read recovery quotes, your own journal entries, or messages from people who love you
- Write down what you are feeling — naming it on paper can be enough to release it

PHYSICAL TOOLS — For when your body needs an outlet

- Go for a walk — even 5 minutes changes your brain chemistry significantly
- Do pushups, jumping jacks, or any exercise until you feel your heart rate shift
- Drink a large glass of cold water immediately — dehydration intensifies cravings
- Eat something — low blood sugar makes cravings dramatically worse
- Take a cold or warm shower — the physical sensation fully resets your nervous system
- Progressive muscle relaxation — tense and release each muscle group slowly

CONNECTION TOOLS — For when isolation is feeding the craving

- Call your sponsor or accountability partner right now — that is what they are there for
- Text someone in your support network — even just "I need support right now"
- Go to a meeting — in person or online, there is always one available
- Read shares in your recovery community, app, or forum
- Reach out to a sober friend and make plans — give yourself something to look forward to

DISTRACTION TOOLS — For when you need to redirect completely

- Watch a show or movie — fully engage your brain with something else entirely
- Play a game on your phone — simple puzzle games are particularly effective
- Cook or bake something — the process keeps your hands and mind busy
- Clean or organize a space — physical tasks with visible results are grounding
- Listen to a podcast or audiobook at full engagement — not as background noise

KNOW YOUR TRIGGERS — THE HALTSB FRAMEWORK

Most cravings don't appear out of nowhere. They are triggered by specific internal states that weaken your defenses. The HALTSB framework helps you identify what is really going on beneath the surface — so you can address the root cause, not just the craving itself.

H — Hungry	Low blood sugar directly intensifies cravings. Your brain reaches for a quick fix when it is not fueled. Always eat regular, balanced meals. Fix it: Eat something now.
A — Angry	Unprocessed anger and resentment are major relapse triggers. Anger that has nowhere to go will find somewhere to go. Fix it: Name it, write it, move your body, call someone.
L — Lonely	Isolation is the enemy of sobriety. When we pull away from people, we pull toward old habits. Connection is not optional in recovery — it is essential. Fix it: Reach out before you reach for something else.
T — Tired	Exhaustion weakens every defense you have. Sleep deprivation impairs judgment and dramatically reduces your ability to resist cravings. Fix it: Rest is a recovery tool. Use it without guilt.
S — Stressed	Stress activates the same brain pathways as cravings. Chronic stress without healthy outlets is one of the most common relapse triggers. Fix it: Breathe first. Solve second.
B — Bored	An idle mind wanders to familiar patterns. Boredom is an underestimated trigger. Have a go-to list of activities ready before boredom hits. Fix it: Have your activity list ready in advance.

WHEN A CRAVING HITS — ASK YOURSELF:

"Am I Hungry? Am I Angry? Am I Lonely? Am I Tired? Am I Stressed? Am I Bored?"

Address the underlying state first. Often the craving will follow once the real need is met.

POWER MANTRAS — READ THESE OUT LOUD

Words have power. When a craving hits, your internal narrative matters enormously. These mantras are designed to interrupt the spiral and replace it with truth. Read them out loud — not in your head. Say them with conviction, even if you don't fully feel it yet. Your brain listens to your voice.

"This craving is temporary. My sobriety is permanent."

"I have survived 100% of my cravings so far. This one is no different."

"I am not giving up what I have built for something that lasts 5 minutes."

"The urge to use is not the same as using. I am in control."

"Every craving I overcome makes me stronger for the next one."

"I choose discomfort over destruction. I choose myself every time."

"I did not come this far to only come this far. I keep going."

"My story is not over. This craving is not the end of my chapter."

"I am allowed to feel this without acting on it. Feelings are not facts."

"One moment at a time. One breath at a time. I can do this."

"The person I am becoming cannot be reached by giving in."

"I have people who believe in me. I choose not to let them down."

TIP: Write your favourite mantra on a sticky note and put it somewhere you will see it every day — your mirror, your phone case, your wallet, your car dashboard.

QUICK REFERENCE — CRAVING HITS: DO THIS NOW

When everything feels overwhelming, come straight to this page. Follow these six steps in order. Do not skip ahead. Do not negotiate with the craving. Just follow the steps.

- 1 STOP** — Don't act on anything. Just pause completely for 60 seconds.
- 2 BREATHE** — Box breathe: 4 in · 4 hold · 4 out · 4 hold. Repeat 4 times.
- 3 NAME IT** — Say out loud: "I am having a craving. It is temporary. It will pass."
- 4 REACH OUT** — Text or call one person right now. You do not have to face this alone.
- 5 MOVE** — Change your physical location or do 10 jumping jacks immediately.
- 6 WAIT** — Set a 10-minute timer. Ride the wave. Reset the timer if needed.

"One day at a time. One craving at a time. One choice at a time."

Your sobriety is built from exactly these moments — the ones where you chose to stay.

You Have Already Survived

Every. Single. Craving. You have ever faced.

That means your track record is 100%. Every time a craving has come for you — every time it felt impossible — you made it through. Keep this guide close. Use it without shame. Come back as many times as you need. There is no limit on how often you can choose yourself.

This guide does not replace professional support. If cravings feel overwhelming, please reach out to a counselor, sponsor, or call SAMHSA's helpline: **1-800-662-4357** (free · confidential · 24/7).

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Supporting your journey — one craving at a time.