

Recovery Craving Assessment

Understanding & Managing Cravings

Thinking Patterns & Progression

Topic Studies · The Recovery Files

In this workbook: key ideas, worksheet.

The topic's scored self-assessment is in the app.

KEY IDEAS

Recovery Craving Assessment

Understanding & Managing Cravings

What Are Cravings?

Cravings are not simply "wanting" something—they involve sophisticated neurobiological responses that manifest across multiple dimensions simultaneously. A craving might begin with a physical sensation, trigger thoughts and memories, intensify through environmental cues, and create compelling mental narratives.

Experiencing cravings does not indicate failure—they are predictable responses that can persist long into recovery.

The goal is not to eliminate cravings but to develop sophisticated awareness and response strategies.

The Seven Dimensions

Understanding Craving Patterns

1

Physical Cravings

Body's neurobiological response

2

Mental Obsession

Persistent intrusive thoughts

3

Thought Associations

Automatic mental connections

4

People Triggers

Social situations and relationships

5

Place Triggers

Locations and environments

6

Object/Situation Triggers

Things and circumstances

7

Underlying Thought Patterns

Core beliefs supporting cravings

Physical Cravings

The Body's Response

Physical cravings represent the body's neurobiological response to absence of addictive substances/behaviors. The brain's reward system creates powerful physical memories that can be triggered by stress, physical states, or neurochemical fluctuations.

Common Manifestations:

- Specific physical sensations (tension, restlessness, empty feeling)
- Phantom sensations "remembering" effects
- Changes in appetite, sleep, or energy
- Physical symptoms during intense cravings
- Body responding before conscious awareness

Management: Breathing exercises, physical movement, grounding techniques, routine self-care

Mental Obsession

When Thoughts Become Intrusive

Mental obsession involves persistent, intrusive thoughts that feel difficult to control. The brain's pattern-recognition system creates strong neural pathways that can be activated by triggers, creating automatic thought patterns.

Common Manifestations:

- Persistent thoughts even when you don't want them
- Elaborate mental fantasies about using
- Mental negotiations about controlled use
- Thoughts more compelling than recovery thoughts
- Mental loops replaying repeatedly

Management: Thought interruption, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness, redirection activities

Trigger Categories

People, Places & Things

□ People

Cravings arising from:

- People who use
- Social situations
- Conflict/tension
- Loneliness/isolation

□ Places

Cravings arising from:

- Former using locations
- Availability environments
- Stressful places
- Travel/new locations

□ Things

Cravings arising from:

- Associated objects
- Media portrayals
- Specific situations
- Sensory experiences

Environmental cues become strongly associated with addictive behaviors through repeated pairing

Underlying Thought Patterns

The Cognitive Foundation

Underlying thought patterns provide the cognitive foundation that makes cravings feel justified or compelling. These often reflect deeper beliefs about deserving, fairness, control, and coping.

Common Patterns:

- "I deserve reward or relief"
- "Life is unfair without my substance/behavior"
- "I'm different—I can control it this time"
- "I've been good long enough to deserve a break"
- "Recovery is too hard/not worth it"

Management: Cognitive restructuring, values clarification, challenging automatic thoughts, self-compassion

Advanced Management Techniques

Building Your Toolkit



Mindful Craving Observation

Observe with curiosity rather than resistance



Urge Surfing

Ride the wave—cravings peak and naturally subside



Values-Based Response

Choose actions aligned with deepest values



Craving Dialogue

Internal conversation—what need does this represent?



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Systematic tension release during cravings



STOP Technique

Stop, Take breath, Observe, Proceed with healthy action

5□

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

Sensory grounding to interrupt craving progression

Emergency Response Plan

Tiered Craving Management

Create a detailed plan for managing acute craving episodes at different intensity levels:

Level 1: Mild Cravings

Self-management: Grounding, breathing, distraction techniques

Level 2: Moderate Cravings

Peer support: Phone call, text, in-person contact with recovery network

Level 3: Severe Cravings

Professional support: Sponsor, counselor, emergency contact activation

Level 4: Crisis Cravings

Immediate safety: Emergency contacts, safe environment, crisis support line

Building Resilience

Long-Term Craving Management

Your relationship with cravings can evolve from fear and resistance to curiosity and skillful management. Many in long-term recovery report cravings becoming less frequent, less intense, and easier to manage over time.

Each craving you successfully manage strengthens your recovery skills and builds confidence.

□ Neuroplasticity

Brain continuously rewires with practice—new pathways strengthen over time

□ Track Progress

Monitor craving frequency, intensity, and management success

□ Support Network

Build relationships that support craving management

□ Practice Skills

Regular practice during calm times builds crisis capability

WORKSHEET

Craving Management Worksheet

Understanding Your Craving Landscape

Which category of cravings (physical, mental obsession, etc.) affects you most powerfully, and why?

What specific craving patterns surprise you with their intensity or persistence?

How have your craving patterns evolved throughout your recovery journey?

What craving experiences have caught you off guard, and what did you learn?

Are there cravings you've successfully learned to manage? How did this happen?

The Psychology of Your Cravings

How does understanding cravings as normal neurobiological responses affect your relationship with them?

In what ways might your addiction history have shaped your particular vulnerabilities?

How do your different types of cravings interact with each other?

What early warning signs indicate you're entering increased craving vulnerability?

How might co-occurring mental health conditions affect your craving patterns?

Developing Your Management Strategies

What specific strategies have proven most effective for your most challenging craving type?

What role does preparation and planning play in your craving management approach?

How do you balance self-reliance with appropriate help-seeking during intense cravings?

What recovery support resources do you mobilize when experiencing cravings?

How might you strengthen your response to your most challenging craving category?

Building Craving Resilience

How has your relationship with cravings changed throughout your recovery journey?

What practices help you maintain perspective during intense craving episodes?

How do you balance vigilance about cravings with living a full, engaged life?

What would it look like to view cravings as information rather than commands?

How might sharing your craving experiences benefit your recovery and help others?

Creating Your Personalized Craving Map

For each category, identify your specific patterns and most effective strategies:

Physical Cravings - Specific sensations & management strategies:

Mental Obsession - Common themes & thought management:

Thought Associations - Automatic connections & interrupt strategies:

People Triggers - Specific people/situations & social management:

Place Triggers - Specific locations & environmental management:

Object/Situation Triggers - Specific things & situational management:

Underlying Thought Patterns - Core thoughts & cognitive management:

Save Responses