



URGE SURFING

What is an urge? A strong desire or impulse.

Examples: the impulse to...

...itch your body, swallow your saliva, blink your eyes, sneeze, cough, speak, stand, leave, yell, drink, eat, use drugs, smoke, lash out, quit, laugh, sleep.

- Urges peak between 20 – 30 minutes if we do not fight them. If we notice the urge without battling it, then it will go away.
- If we go to battle with our urges (e.g., “I can’t stand this! I must get rid of this feeling right now!”), the urge will take longer to go away.
- Giving in to urges makes them stronger, and more difficult to stop in the long run.

WHEN TO URGE SURF:

- When you notice urges to go back to an old habit that you are trying to stop.
- When you notice yourself having a strong impulse.
- Practice daily, that way you can urge surf when you feel very strong urges or impulses.

Most urges will pass after about 30 minutes of avoiding the behavior. What a person does and doesn’t do then during those 30 minutes can be a huge part of the success. We know that these urges will build and die out, sometimes in several cycles during the 30 minutes. Because of this, psychologists have likened the process to that of riding a wave. If you are around the ocean, then you know that the waves will come. You can’t stop them, but you can certainly learn to surf.

This workbook has three options to “surf the urge”. One is a meditation approach, one is a visualization approach, and the other is a worksheet (with an example). Try them all! Let us know how it goes and if you have any questions!



Surf the Urge Meditation

Step One: learn to notice the urge building as close as possible to the beginning. It is important to acknowledge it, welcome it, talk to it, and then focus more on it. Try to understand what is going on in you and all around you as the urge is just getting started. We know that if a person denies it, pretends it's not there, and tries not to focus on it...the urge will get more intense. The more a person tries NOT to give in, the stronger the temptation may become.

Step Two: focus on the urge itself. We ask where it is in the body, what it feels like, and everything we can learn about it. We can see if it is strong or weak... if it is growing or weakening. We focus on it as an observer, as a surfer watching the approaching waves to determine which one to select for surfing.

Step Three: surf the urge. We allow ourselves to ride with the urge while not giving in to it.

Step Four: use meditation and breathing and ongoing focus on the urge and the body to release the tension and allow the “surfing” to continue until the urge subsides. Another place we see this used is when women are in labor about to have a baby. The abdominal contractions rise, peak, and then subside in cycles. For many decades we've been teaching women to use meditation and breathing to “surf” their contractions ... and it works well for many women.

More recently psychologists are referring to this process as “mindfulness.” Mindfulness is a term or practice borrowed from the Buddhist religion. The idea is to focus on one's current experience in the here-and-now, not judging or analyzing it. It is to focus on just one thing, your current experience and practicing the release of everything else.

Below is a diagram to illustrate what we are describing.





This urge surfing takes practice. Meditation and prayer take practice. Mindfulness takes practice. All these practices can yield great rewards for our mental well-being and in our spiritual growth. Life comes at us sometimes like waves. It can be much better to surf than to fight them. If we fight them, we will usually get tired and fall into despair.

Visualizing Surfing the Urge

Sit in a quiet place, and close or relax your eyes.

- Think about the urge that you want to surf. You can only surf one urge at a time.
- Mentally scan your body. Figure out where you feel the urge most strongly (for example, your mouth waters when you are experiencing an urge to eat a sugary food).
- Imagine that your urge is like an ocean wave.
 - Waves are small when they start, grow big, and then break up.
 - Watch the waves rise and fall repeatedly as the intensity of your urge gets stronger and weaker.
 - Pay attention to your breath. Use the breath as a surfboard until the urge passes. No matter how big the wave gets or how much you feel as if the wave will swallow you, use your breath to ride each wave that comes.
 - As you're riding the wave, you may find it helpful to silently describe the sensations in a neutral way (e.g., I notice my hand itches. The urge to itch is getting stronger. I want to use my other hand to itch it. With each breath, the itch is getting weaker.)
- Practice surfing the urge waves for 1 minute. Add 1 minute each time you practice.



Urge Surfing Worksheet

The purpose of this exercise is not to make the craving go away but to experience cravings and learn how to ride them out until they easily go away.

Point 1: The Trigger

Explanation: The trigger may be a thought, feeling, person, or place that causes someone to have an urge.

How to deal with it: If you already know your triggers, it's best to prepare different ways to cope.

Point 2 and 3: The Rise and Peak

Explanation: During the rise, you may feel your urge growing - slowly or quickly - until it reaches the peak, where it may feel like you're overwhelmed and can't handle the urge.

How to deal with it: While riding points 2 and 3, some ways to cope are to feel your feelings and allow the thoughts to pass instead of hiding or stopping them from happening. As this happens, it will also help if you tell yourself that urges are normal, temporary, uncomfortable, and, most of all, don't have to be acted upon. You can also find activities that distract you while they go through these wave points. Here are some OTHER SKILLS you can use:

Managing Triggers

Use coping skills to reduce the power of triggers. Know your triggers ahead of time, and have a strategy or skill prepared for each one.

Examples: deep breathing if stressed, eating if hungry, leaving a location if it is high risk

Delay & Distraction

Do something to take your mind off the urge. Every minute you delay increases the chance of the urge weakening on its own.

Examples: go for a walk, listen to music, call a friend, read a book, practice a hobby

Point 4: The Fall

Explanation: You are at the end. You have ridden the waves, which means the worst is over.

At this point, it's most helpful to think of and record what was effective in helping to manage any unwanted behaviors and to remember them the next time you have urges.



1. Identify and describe the trigger.
2. What are you feeling, or how is your body reacting to the trigger?
3. When did the urges start and stop?
4. What will happen if you don't shift your urges?
5. Anything more you want to share?



6. Remind yourself that...

7. I can manage my triggers by...

8. I can take my mind off my urges by...



Example:



1. Identify and describe the trigger.
When I receive bad news from a family member, friend, or someone at work.
2. What are you feeling, or how is your body reacting to the trigger?
I immediately feel sad and reach for whatever sugar I can find.
3. When did the urges start and stop?
The urges began when I first used sugary foods and I realized how good I felt while I was using them. I constantly have those urges when I receive bad news. The only time I stop eating sugary foods is when I finish the stash I have in my home.
4. What will happen if you don't shift your urges?
I will remain dependent on sugary foods to deal with my feelings or problems. It will also affect my health.
5. Anything more you want to share?
None currently.



6. Remind yourself that...

Urges are normal. It's ok to feel bad when you receive sad or horrible news. It's normal to feel angry, sad, or disappointed. It's ok to cry it out instead of bottling it up and riding through what I feel.

7. I can manage my triggers by...

Informing my loved ones that I may not be in a good state to receive bad news. Avoiding additional bad news that I get from media or social media.

8. I can take my mind off my urges by...

Going to a different place where there's no sugary foods. Watching a movie can make me cry or get angry so I can let out all my emotions without harming my health or anyone else.

With practice, urges will become easier to ride out. You will be able to stick to your goals, instead of being controlled by your urges.

Please let The Sweet Sobriety Team know if you have any questions about how to Urge Surf! We can be reached at info@sweetsobriety.ca