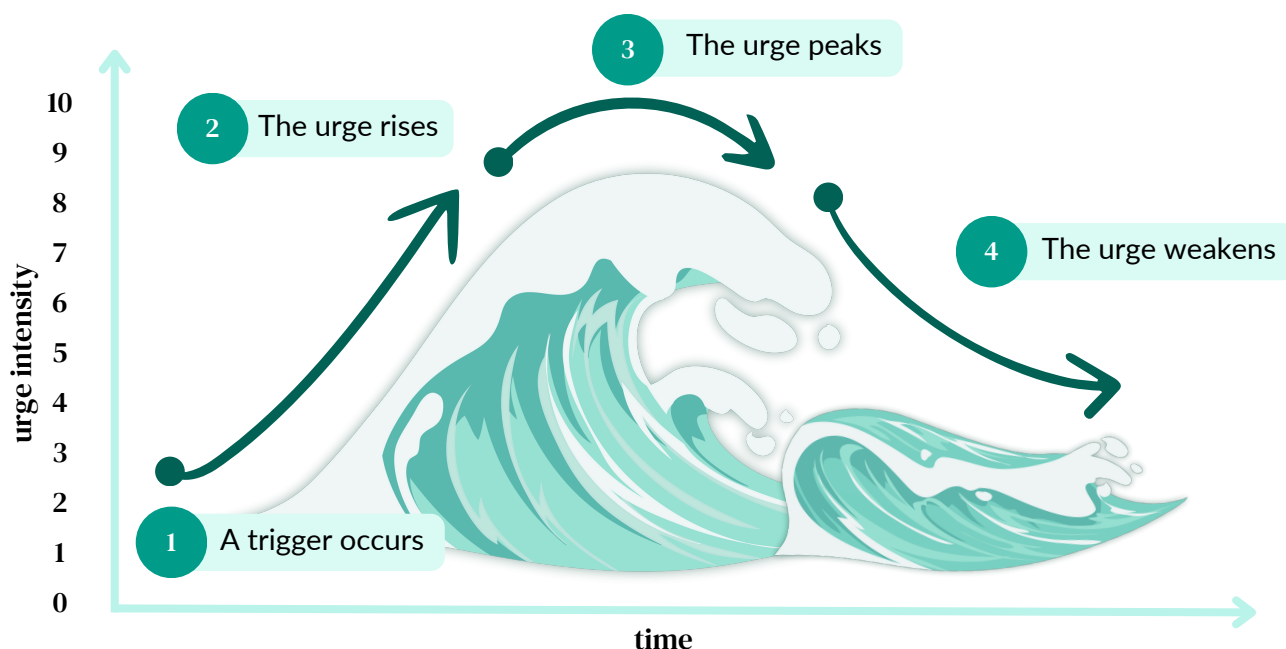


Urge Surfing

Urge surfing is a powerful tool from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) for staying in control. With this worksheet, learn what urges are and how you can “ride the wave” of urges until they naturally decrease in strength.

What is urge surfing?

Urge surfing is the idea of resisting an urge long enough for it to go away on its own. If we don't act on them or ruminate about them (think about the urge over and over and over), most urges rise in intensity, come to a peak, and slowly go away, like a wave.



What are urges?

An urge is a strong impulse, craving, or desire to act. Urges are not inherently negative or harmful. We might feel a strong urge to leave a dangerous situation or stand up for a loved one, for example. However, acting on *some* urges might not help us in the long run:

Acting on an urge to...	could...	but might...
eat lots of rich food	taste great in the moment	make you feel sick later
smoke	bring you relief	harm your health over time
yell or scream at someone	release your anger	hurt your relationship with them

Do you experience any urges that cause you distress or problems in the long run?

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*



Urge Surfing

What does urge surfing feel like?

You can try a mini version of urge surfing anytime to see what it feels like:

- ☐ Place a piece of candy or gum in your mouth. Don't chew or swallow - just notice if you feel an *urge* to do so. Take note of how strong or weak the urge feels over time.
- ☐ The next time you get notifications on your phone, don't act on them. Just notice if you feel an urge to open the notifications. Is the urge stronger, weaker, or longer-lasting depending on the app that is notifying you?

You might notice that urge surfing can be uncomfortable. This is normal, and why mindfulness skills can be so helpful. Mindfulness helps us notice, but not be swept away by, our emotions, sensations, urges, and thoughts.

Urge surfing and mindfulness

It might sound surprising, but **observing** and **describing** how you feel are foundational mindfulness skills that you can use to urge surf. The next time you feel a distressing urge, try pausing, taking a deep breath, and answering these questions in detail.

What do you have the urge to do?



What emotions are you feeling?



What words or images are going through your mind?



What are you feeling in your body?

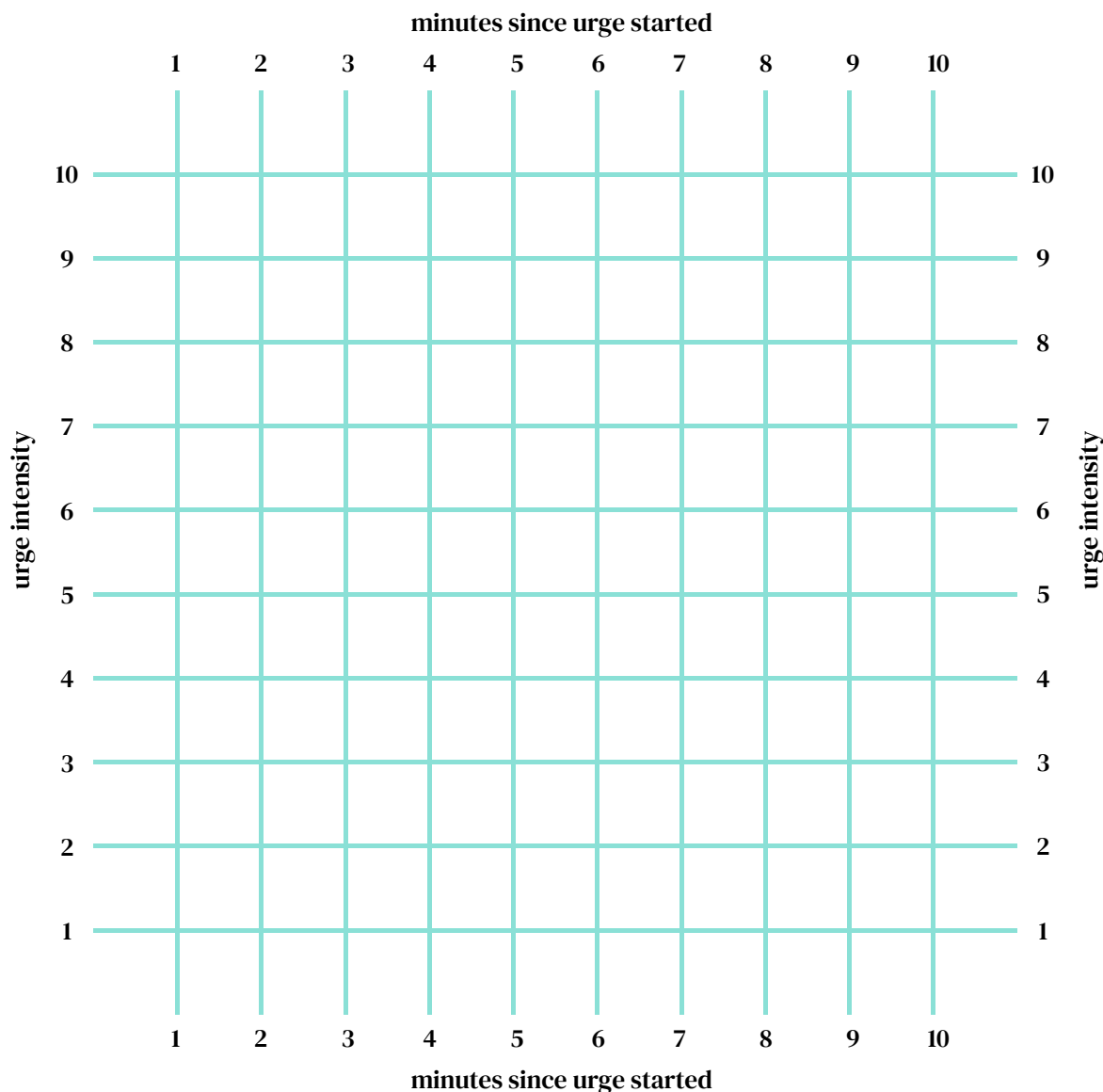


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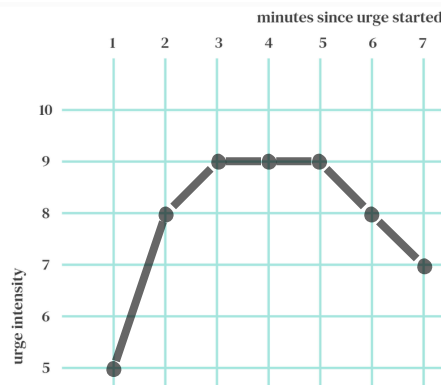
Urge Surfing

Another way to mindfully observe an urge is to rate its strength over time using a timer and a chart. When you feel a strong or distressing urge, set a timer to go off after one minute.



After one minute, rate how intense the urge feels to you from 1 (very weak) to 10 (very strong). Mark your rating with a dot where the vertical “1” line meets the horizontal line that matches your rating. After another minute, rate your urge again and mark it on the vertical “2” line.

Continue until 10 minutes have gone by, then connect all of the dots as shown in the example to the right.



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Urge Surfing

Which urge did you surf?

What was the “shape” of your urge over time?

Was 10 minutes long enough to see your urge start to decrease in intensity on its own?

Urge surfing and coping skills

At times, urges are so overwhelming that we might need to use coping skills. Here are a variety of skills you might try the next time you experience a strong or distressing urge.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Breathe deep into your belly (not shallowly into your chest).
Imagine calm entering on every inhale, and the urge exiting on every exhale.

Thank Your Body and Mind

Urges are how our bodies and minds tell us it's time to act.
Tell them, “Thank you for telling me, but we've got this. We can wait it out.”

Greet the Urge at the Door

(This one is a little silly, but...) If your urge is familiar to you, “greet” it - “Hello! I was expecting you!” This helps us separate from the urge a little.

Ground to Your Body

Take a deep breath and mentally scan the parts of your body not involved in the urge.
Feel your feet on the floor, your back against your chair.

Ground to Your Environment

Sometimes urges can bring up past memories or future worries. Return to the present by naming 5 things you can see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can feel, and 2 you can smell.

Use Mantras

Remind yourself that “This too shall pass,” “Feelings are temporary,” “I can observe the wave but not get swept up by it,” or whatever works for you.

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://choosingtherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

Learn More with [Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



[Free Mental Health Worksheets](#)

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