

Urge Surfing

Many people try to cope with their urges by gritting their teeth and toughing it out. Some urges may be too strong to ignore. When this happens, it can be useful to stay with your urge to use until it passes. This technique is called *urge surfing*.

Urges are like ocean waves. They start out small, grow to a peak then break and fade off. You can imagine yourself riding the wave, staying on top of it until it crests, breaks, and turns into less powerful, foamy surf. The basis of urge surfing is similar to that of many martial arts. In judo, it is possible to overpower an opponent by first *going with* the force of the attack. By joining with the opponent's force, control is taken and redirected to obtain the advantage. To practice this type of technique, of gaining control by first going with the opponent, take the following steps:

1. Take inventory of your craving experience. Sit in a comfortable chair with your feet flat on the floor and your hands in a comfortable position. Take a few deep breaths and focus inward. Allow your attention to wander through your body. Notice where in your body you experience the craving and what the sensations are like. Notice each area where you experience the urge and tell yourself what you are experiencing. For example, "Let me see. My craving is in my mouth and nose and in my stomach."
2. Focus on one area where you are experiencing the urge. Notice the exact sensations in that area. Do you feel hot, cold, tingly, or numb? Are your muscles tense or relaxed? How large an area is involved? Notice the sensations and describe them to yourself. Notice the changes that occur in the sensation. For example, "Well, my mouth feels dry and parched. There is tension in my lips and tongue. I keep swallowing. As I exhale, I can imagine the smell and taste of marijuana."
3. Refocus on each part of your body that experiences the craving. Pay attention to and describe to yourself the changes that occur in the sensations. Notice how the urge comes and goes.

Many people notice that after a few minutes of urge surfing the craving vanishes. The purpose of this exercise, however, is not to make the craving go away but to experience the craving in a new way. If you practice urge surfing, you will become familiar with your cravings and learn how to ride them out until they easily go away.