

MODULE 7 ACTIVITY

Urge Surfing

An urge is a strong desire or craving to act impulsively and out of habit. An urge occurs right before a behavior and is experienced as an intense physical and emotional experience. Urges get triggered by an event, thought, feeling, memory, or image and pull us towards automatic ways of responding. Urges can feel like waves: they rise in intensity and tug and pull us toward enacting old behaviors that may provide us with temporary relief but often lead to negative consequences in the long run. Rather than struggling and fighting an urge, we can ride it by staying present and mindful, noticing the moment it peaks and the moment it crashes.

Urges are temporary. Therefore, you don't have to act on them for them to change and morph. Whenever you feel an impulse or have a nagging thought, bring your attention to your breathing and bodily sensations and stay curious and present with your present-moment experiences. **Urge surfing** is a mindfulness technique that you can use to get through an urge without acting on destructive impulses. When you notice an urge, rather than fighting against it, imagine you are on a surfboard riding with it. Notice the shifting sensations: how they rise and fall, come and go.

Part 1: Getting Practice with a Simple Meditation Practice

Urge surfing builds upon our base mindfulness skill by not only being aware of our thoughts and emotions but by increasing our ability to experience discomfort, boredom, apathy, and other similar emotions.

To practice, we are going to sit still for three minutes. It is likely that an urge will arise to itch or shift in your chair. Resist this urge and practice surfing it instead by remaining mindful and still. Remember, urge surfing is just like riding a wave. Urges come and go, and we don't need to act on them. The urge *can* and *will* go.

[Use this video for a guided practice.](#)

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Part 2: Increasing the Challenge

When it comes to mindfulness, there is no “winning.” There is no level of mindfulness that is considered “expert.” But there is a skill to it—a skill that can be improved when life gets challenging. Practicing urge surfing while listening to a video in a safe environment is one thing; doing it in “real life” is entirely different.

So, we need to increase the challenge difficulty to help transfer the skill from one environment to another. Try some of these increasingly challenging exercises below:

- **Re-watch the video, sitting where you are, but put something under your legs that creates a strong sensation. This could be something with a pointy edge.**
- **Wrap an ice pack in a towel and hold it with your bare hands for as long as you can.**
- **Hold your breath for as long as you can. Do this multiple times.**
- **Stare into your practice partner’s or teammate’s eyes without saying anything for 3-5 minutes or longer.**