

iNaturally™

Catherine McCoy
- INTEGRATIVE NATUROPATH -

REBOOT YOUR HEALTH, REBUILD YOUR LIFE™

Using “Delay Discounting” to Get Control of Your Cravings

Instant gratification. Have you heard of it?

It’s not only the scourge of younger generations who are constantly on an electronic device. I’ll bet you’ve experienced it too.

Cravings are all about instant gratification. When we want it, we want it. **Now!**

Here’s the thing. Your brain prefers immediate gratification. It’s part of your survival instinct. When you crave something or want something, your body releases feel good neurotransmitters and triggers a **dopamine anticipation response**.

A dopamine response is all about the **anticipation** of what you’ll get, how you’ll feel when you eat that thing, or do that thing. It has nothing to do with how you’ll feel afterwards. That’s how addictions build up – your brain is chasing the anticipation.

But, there is a way to short circuit instant gratification when cravings threaten to derail you.

Delay Discounting

It’s called “**delay discounting**”. Which describes an interesting brain perception.

This happens when you delay satisfying your craving:

The further away a reward appears, either in space or time, the less appealing it is to your brain.

Your brain's reward system did not evolve sufficiently to respond to future rewards. It's all about survival, about being in the moment, not planning, not anticipation. Remember, your brain's default is still back in the days when survival was the key driver of daily life. If a reward was a long way off, like 10km or 10 days, then it was pretty much useless and lost all appeal.

Today, we still feel that temptations that are nearby, or right in front of us like the party or fridge, are far more irresistible than one in the future or hard to get.

The Good News

As soon as you create distance (physical or time) between yourself and whatever it is that's tempting you or craving, you immediately take the power away from the brain's reward centre and give it back to your brain's self-control system.

This even works when the temptation is staring you right in the face!

Neuroscientists have discovered that just a **10 minute delay** in getting something you think you so desperately want/need makes a huge difference in how your brain values that reward. It immediately turns instant gratification into a future reward. That small shift is enough to short circuit your brain. Your brain finds something in the future less appealing.

Distance = less power!

Action Step

Try this exercise the next time you feel tempted by a craving:

- Tell yourself that you will have whatever you're craving but you'll have it in **10 minutes from now**.
- Set the alarm on your phone or watch.
- Put the thing you want out of sight.
- Do something else - you can distract yourself by doing something physical or use the time to get curious about what you're feeling and thinking that's making the thing so tempting.
- Perhaps sit and make notes on how you're feeling and why you want the "thing". Is it because you're really hungry, you're tired, you need a pick me up, you deserve a

reward, you're upset, angry or bored. Be honest with yourself without being critical. Don't judge. Just note it down.

- Once the 10 minutes is over, tune in to how **you're feeling**. Really think about it (not just a passing thought). Determine whether or not you still want the thing that's tempting you.
- You may find that the desire is no longer there. Yay! Pat yourself on the back.
- Or you might find that the desire is still strong. If it is, go ahead and have it.

Remember, you still did good work in disrupting those old neural pathways and rewiring old habits. Next time will be easier.

Because, what you repeat becomes stronger.

TIP

If you feel you've messed up (again), remember that every time you fail or fall off the good intention wagon, it creates another opportunity to succeed.

Don't hold yourself hostage to your failures and keep yourself stuck in "failure land". Use the opportunity to get back on track, like a reset button and remind yourself why your goal or target was important to you in the first place.

With your health in mind,
Catherine x