

3P (*pull, pause, push*): a new self-help approach to addiction

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We have developed a new method that reduced cravings for alcohol by more than a third in a controlled study. The method is based on a technique called imaginal retraining. Before performing the modified technique, which is called 3P (*pull, pause, push*), please read the original manual on imaginal retraining to familiarize yourself with the theoretical background of the approach. You can find the manual here: www.uke.de/craving

Studies have shown that the original imaginal retraining technique successfully reduces cravings for alcohol, tobacco, and high-calorie foods (published studies can be found near the bottom of the following webpage—click on publications: www.clinical-neuropsychology.de/retraining-a-method-to-reduce-alcohol-consumption/). However, the effects were rather small.

The modified 3P technique combines retraining with another technique, known as decoupling, that has proven effective in reducing body-focused repetitive behaviors such as hair pulling/trichotillomania and nail biting (studies can be found at www.uke.de/decoupling). This modified protocol was superior to the original retraining in a recent study.

3P: A new approach to addiction

- As in the original retraining technique, only *imagine* the addictive substance but do actually perform the movements. You can keep your eyes closed or open while performing this technique.
- As in the original retraining technique, identify 2–5 addictive substances (e.g., glass of wine, chocolate bar) that typically play a major role in your craving. Every once in a while, change the addictive substance you imagine before repeating the exercise.

Implementation

- Pull: Think of one of your addictive substances and move it toward your mouth (again, imagine the substance but actually perform the movements). **The execution of the**

movements should be as close as possible to your movements when drinking, snacking, smoking, etc.—but do not perform the pull movement with your usual amount of enthusiasm or desire.

- Pause: Stop abruptly approximately 10–15 cm (4–6 in) before your hand reaches your mouth while freezing your mental image of the glass of beer, cigarette, chocolate bar, etc. Hold this position for about as long as you would normally need to take the first sip, inhalation, or bite.
- Push: Now, as in the original technique, throw the *imagined* addictive substance away from you so that the substance bursts or smears all over the (imagined) wall in front of you. Again, simply imagine the substance but actually perform the movement.

When to perform

Practice this technique 3 times a day (it's best to set a smartphone timer) if possible and also prior to any "temptation situation."