What is it?

What does it have to do with addiction?

What can I do about it?

Instant Gratification

Everything you need to know about instant gratification and addiction

Complete Workbook and step by step guide

Recovery Revived
Instant Gratification

What is it?

Instant gratification is when you make an impulsive decision to satisfy your wants and desires at that current moment, even if you know it will somehow negatively impact your goals in the future. Usually a form of temptation that provides us with brief feelings of pleasure (such as junk food or binge watching a tv series), we are left with no true fulfillment and even further away from achieving our goals.

The mindset of “I’ll deal with the repercussions later”
You do what you want, instead of what you should.

The harder you work for something, the more you value and appreciate it. **No pain, no gain.** To really achieve something that provides us with fulfillment we must be willing to pay the price. It can take weeks, months, or even years of delayed gratification to achieve long term goals. Once you begin to see your hard work pay off, it provides a lasting sense of accomplishment that significantly outweighs any temporary discomfort previously experienced.

The important things in life don’t happen overnight. Graduating college, genuine friendships, marriage, earning a successful career, having a family, and becoming a homeowner are common achievements that can take years of delaying instant gratification.

**Individuals that are constantly giving in to instant gratification get stuck in a cycle, expecting to gain something but putting in no effort and wondering why they have not achieved their goals.**

Where does it come from?

We live in a society where businesses and corporations make a tremendous profit from exploiting our desire for instant gratification. Businesses stay open 24/7, credit cards allow us to buy things we don’t have money in our bank accounts for, and fast food allows us a quick and cheap alternative to cooking.

Some of us were also raised by parents that constantly fulfilled our instant gratifications, we were never taught to wait until a special occasion or complete chores to earn it. Constantly getting what we want whenever we want leads to unrealistic standards, feelings of entitlement, and lack of motivation.
**Instant Gratification**

**What does it have to do with addiction?**

Drugs and alcohol provide us instant gratification by flooding our brains reward system with feelings of euphoria. For individuals that focus on external things to fix their dissatisfaction, drugs and alcohol can become a quick fix.

*Feeling stressed? Take a pill. Low confidence? Have a few drinks.*

This quick fix only changes our current feelings and not the underlying reason of our dissatisfaction. So once the drugs wear off, the feelings return and a cycle begins. Constantly using "quick fixes" causes our brain to become conditioned to rely on the drug for relief. To adjust to the surges of dopamine (pleasure) the drugs give us, our brain starts producing less dopamine to make room for the surges. This is why friends and family see a personality shift in a person who abuses drugs. The drug abuse makes them eventually feel depressed, and unable to enjoy things that were previously pleasurable to them. This causes the person to take the drug just to feel normal and fulfill some of their daily responsibilities. Desperate for those fleeting feelings the drug once gave them, users begin searching for higher highs- increasing their use/building tolerance, snorting, injecting, and progressing deeper into the vicious cycle of addiction. **Faced with the physical/mental consequences of their substance use, users have two options:**

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**Instant Gratification**

Continue substance use to ward off withdrawal symptoms, choosing short term relief, knowing it will not benefit you in the long term and you be in the same situation again when the drugs wear off.

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**Deferred Gratification**

Under go uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms and suffer short term, acknowledging that subsiding into using drugs to feel better will sabotage your current goal of becoming sober.
**What Can I do about it?**

Finally free from drugs or alcohol for the first time in years, someone in early recovery can become overwhelmed with feelings. They are left to face the life they built around their addiction, living day to day and forfeiting their long term goals. This can make someone feel years "behind" in life when they first get sober. Wanting to make up for lost time, the individual can fall back into the instant gratification thought process and become frustrated when the universe does not give them what they want, when they want it. Here are some things that will help the transition.

**Acceptance**

You are not going to want to hear this.. but it is what it is. Focusing on the past, on the things you did or you didn’t do is just going to fuel your addiction. Take a breathe and accept where you are in this moment. Don’t compare yourself to other people at your age and focus what they accomplished, **you are not them**. You can either start today or find a reason not to. The choice is yours.

**Long term goals**

Start figuring out what you want to accomplishment. Whether it is getting a degree, buying a house, finding a significant other, running a marathon, or starting a family. Identify some long term goals and break them down into smaller ones. **Create a plan.** By doing that you will be able to focus on what you need to accomplish **today** to achieve your long term goal.

**Reward yourself**

Rewarding yourself appropriately along the way to achieving your long term goals can keep you motivated. Just make sure these are **thought out and planned rewards** or you can easily fall into the instant gratification cycle again. It can be something like a cheat meal once a week if you’re on a diet, or maybe going out for a fun night with all your friends after you completed midterms or finals. Rewarding yourself like this can give you something to look forward to in the short term, making your long term goals less daunting and more achievable.

**Prioritize**

Every decision that you have to make, question yourself and **if it is going to bring you closer to or further away from long term goal**. You may have to do this a lot at first, but it will become second nature soon.
Instant Gratification

What does it have to do with me?

Think back your childhood and growing up, what values did your parents instill on you? Were you taught to wait until birthday or holidays for presents? Did you have to work and save up your own money if you wanted something?

How did these values impact you in adulthood?

Think of something you consider an accomplishment. Provide examples of how you had to delay your instant gratification to achieve it.
Think of someone you admire (famous or not), why do you admire them? In what ways did they have to delay their instant gratifications to reach their goals?

Provide examples of some achievements that you have not accomplished yet because you have trouble delaying instant gratification?

Provide examples of how you can start delaying your instant gratification today and how it can benefit you long term. Write out a few short term sacrifices that will benefit your long term goals.
Do you usually seek out external things, believing that they will make you happy? Or find yourself thinking "I'll be happy or fulfilled when/if I get......."

**For example, thinking that you will be happy or fulfilled if you had more money, lost weight, or found a significant other.**

Have you ever had trouble with moderation? Do you usually do things in excess if it provides feelings of pleasure?

**For example, overeating/binge eating, binge watching television, or playing video games for hours.**

Do you feel like you are missing something in your life.. unable to find a lasting solution? Equivalent to a void or emptiness inside you that no matter what you have tried- are unable to fulfill?
List specific examples of temptations you find difficult to resist indulging. How does indulging in these temptations interfere with your long term goals?

Write down examples of when you justified or made excuses for indulging your desire for instant gratification.

**For example, telling yourself you deserve a few drinks after work to relax, or blaming someone else for the reason you drink or do drugs.**

Think of a time that you were trying to achieve a specific goal and had trouble delaying gratification, how did it negatively impacted you?

**For example, someone that has a goal of staying sober experiences cravings to use drugs, not wanting to feel this uncomfortable feeling, they use the drug again to get rid of their cravings—providing brief relief but sabotaging their goal.**
Identify and discuss how you felt after you made this decision? How did you feel after the pleasure wore off? How did you feel about yourself? Were you happy you made that decision or did you feel regret and/or shame?

**ELABORATE AND BE SPECIFIC.**

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How do you usually deal with setbacks when trying to achieve a goal? Do you give up easily? Or do you become more motivated and work harder?

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What is the difference between "living in the moment" and instant gratification?
Delivering Gratification  
**Step by Step Guide**

**Step 1: Identify a Long Term Goal**

Make sure your goal is SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely). For example, "I will graduate from college with a bachelors degree in 4 years"

**Ask Yourself these Questions:** What do I want to achieve? Why do I want to achieve this? How will it benefit me?

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Now break down your long term goal into several short term goals. Prioritize the most important things you need to accomplish in the near future. For example, "I will call my community college tomorrow and schedule an appointment to meet with an advisor."

**Write out the Short Term Goals You Need to Achieve This Month to Reach Your Long Term Goal.**

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**Step 2: Identify Potential Temptations & Obstacles**

List specific temptations, situations, feelings, thoughts, people, roadblocks, or anything else that may arise and negatively impact or distract you from achieving your goals.

*Procrastinating assignments and studying*

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**Step 3: Identify How to Handle Them Appropriately**

Being prepared to deal with certain situations can help minimize impulsivity, poor decision making, and help you achieve your goals more easily.

*Begin assignments ASAP, and set aside time everyday dedicated to schoolwork*

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**Step 4: Look at "The Big Picture"**

It can be easy to get lost in all the short term goals and sacrifices you are currently making with little or no feelings of accomplishments. When things become difficult, overwhelming, boring or unexpected this causes us to question our desire and commitment.

**When you feel this way...**

- **DO NOT make any impulsive decisions**- this can lead to self sabotaging.
- **Remember why you started**- think about your end goal, why you ever wanted to achieve it and how you will benefit from it.
- **Acknowledge the progress you have made.**
- **Don’t compare yourself to others.**
- **Don’t give up**- be flexible and adjust your goals as necessary.

**It is important to remember...**

- There will be times that you will question your ability or desire to continue moving forward.
- There will be times that you want to give up, or take the easy way out.
- You will most likely experience setbacks that are completely out of your control.

**What are some things you can do or tell yourself that will help you focus on the big picture?** For example, reaching out to supports, reading personal success stories related to your goal, reciting quotes such as "this too shall pass" or "nothing worth having comes easy"
**Step 5: “Play the tape through to the end”**

What does "play the tape through to the end" mean? Exactly how it sounds, when distractions and temptations present themselves- force yourself to play out the scenario of the decision you want to make. **Play out the entire situation including every direct and potential consequence it has on your goal.** It is extremely important that you do this step thoroughly, because you are currently conditioned to "pausing the tape" when you get to the part you want. Since indulging instant gratification gives us immediate results- we pause the tape almost immediately never playing it through to the end. Playing the entire tape through forces us to spend more time thinking about the decision, acknowledging the benefits and consequences- which reduces impulsive and self sabotaging behaviors.

Decisions that we make can impact us on a wide spectrum. You may not experience consequences with every impulsive, gratifying decision you make. You may not even know there are potential consequences for some decisions. **It is when these decisions add up or are repeated.** Some situations will be more obvious than others, this is why you need to be mindful and have a clear vision of what you want to achieve.

*For example, skipping class one time won't result in me never graduating college- but constantly missing classes can lead to violating the attendance policy or poor test scores.*

**Ask yourself these questions:**

- Is this bringing me closer or further away from my goal?
- Is this benefiting me in any way?
- What are the potential consequences?
- What am I putting at risk?
- If I indulge-will I be able to stop?
- How can this decision influence other short term decisions?
- What am I currently feeling? What feeling am I trying to escape and why?
- Will I feel better or worse tomorrow?
- Am I thinking logically or emotionally?
- Have I done this before or made a similar decision-what was the outcome?
- Am I letting anyone down?
- What will happen if I DON'T do this?
- Who would tell me to say no to this decision? Why would they?
- Will I have to hide this decision or lie to someone about it?
- Will this build my self esteem and self worth?
**Step 6: Plan rewards for yourself**

Rewarding yourself for completing short term goals can keep you motivated and less likely to get distracted. It gives you something to look forward in the short term and provides some sort of lasting satisfaction because you earned it. Planned rewards allow you to indulge in something without hindering any progress you have made. It allows you to stay in control, gain confidence in yourselves, and build motivation. Planned rewards should be specific and match your accomplishment, the harder the goal-the better the reward. This is important so that the reward doesn’t derail you and hinder your progress. **The reward should not be something you struggle controlling.** For example, someone that has a goal of staying sober won’t reward themselves for making progress by drinking alcohol, or someone that has a goal of losing 50 pounds shouldn’t reward themselves with junk food.

An example of planned out and specific reward would be.. buying yourself a new pair of pants after you lose 10 pounds or getting a 2 hour massage after you finish a semester in college.

**Appropriate rewards for my short term goals:**

**Inappropriate rewards for my short term goals:**