

# Soothing Intense Emotions

Intense emotions can lead people to do desperate things to relieve them. Examples including self-destructive behaviors like cutting, and self-medicating with drugs or alcohol. Actually both of these are a form of self-medicating. Cutting the skin releases natural opiates in the brain (called endorphins) which have a soothing effect. The only problem with these solutions is that they cause damage and can be addictive.

## Avoid Making it Worse

So what is one to do during intense emotions? To start with, avoid things that bring quick relief but cause longer-term harm. Examples include:

- Self injury
- Drugs and alcohol
- Dangerous behavior, such as promiscuity or reckless driving
- Destructive arguments

## Safe Relief

Next, try physical things that can raise your endorphins without causing damage. Try one from this list. If it doesn't work, just move on to the next one:

- Squeeze an ice cube. This is especially effective if you burn yourself often, as putting ice on a spot you want to burn gives you a strong painful sensation and leaves a red mark afterwards.
- Bite into a hot pepper. Chew on frozen fruit, ginger, or lemon peels.
- Take a cold shower.
- Go out for a run or exercise.
- Bite into wasabi or wasabi peas.
- Pour school glue on your skin, allow it to dry, and peel it off.
- Fill a bucket or sink with ice water and put your head in it.
- Put on sun screen and lay in the sun.
- Hold a hot water bottle to your neck.
- Pull weeds in the garden (this is particularly good as a replacement for hair-pulling).
- Use aromatherapy (lavender helps anxiety; citrus and mint help depression).
- Listen to soothing music. Or loud music.
- Call a friend and just talk.
- Take a hot shower.
- Paint. Use body paint instead of self-cutting.
- Slap your wrist in a way that doesn't leave damage (or with a rubber band around your wrist).
- Flatten aluminum cans for recycling.
- Hit a punching bag or a mattress/pillow.
- Break sticks.

There is also a blood pressure medicine called clonidine which can be taken as needed to reduce impulses to self-harm. Ask your provider if it may be appropriate for you.

—Chris Aiken, M.D., updated 11/26/2016

