

THE NO CONTACT CHECKLIST

No contact is the foundation stone for beating limerence. At first glance, it also seems as though it should be simple – you just stop contacting your limerent object (LO). Easy! Well... it turns out that life is a bit more complicated than that.

When you attempt to go no contact, your limerent brain will fight back. You've spent the recent past accidentally training it to seek your LO at all costs, and undoing that training takes time. There are pitfalls along the way. You need a plan.

Taking time to develop a strategy, anticipate likely obstacles, and come up with contingency plans will transform your chance of success. Here, then, is a checklist of Things To Do before you embark on your campaign to free yourself from the limerence trap:



□ 1. DECIDE WHAT "CONTACT" MEANS TO YOU

The surest strategy is to cut contact with LO entirely - no meetings, no phone calls, no texts, no social media, nothing. But that is not always practical. If your LO is a co-worker or a neighbour or someone you need to interact with to meet your responsibilities, then you are going to have to accept limited contact as a compromise. Analyse the situation. How close could you get to true no contact? What alternative arrangements could you make to avoid their company? It's good to define specific boundaries at the outset so you know when you have met them. "I will only interact with LO at work to meet my professional obligations. No social events. No chit chat. No non-work emails."

□ 2. PICK YOUR WITHDRAWAL STRATEGY

Once you know what level of contact you are aiming for, you need to devise a route to get there. The simplest is cold turkey. Cut off all contact immediately. Again, if you can arrange it, this is the safest choice – but it is disruptive, and people are bound to notice. The alternative approach is to use a staged withdrawal strategy. Slowly decrease the amount of contact over time, so that you cool the turkey down without a sudden plunge into ice water. Be specific: "I am allowed three meetings this week, two the week after, one the week after that, then none for a week. Once a fortnight is the maximum number of meetings that I will tolerate."

□ 3. HAVE A SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

In today's hyperconnected world, LO is only ever a screen away. This is a temptation, but it also risks unexpected intrusion into your attention when the all-powerful algorithms throw news of LO into your feed. Excluding, muting, unfriending, and generally setting the conditions up to prevent LO from contacting you actively or passively is a very good idea. Use technology as a servant to help you meet your goals; don't tolerate it as a force working against you.

□ 4. ENGAGE A CHAMPION

Few things help us meet our goals more than social accountability. If you can declare your no contact plans to a trusted friend, counsellor, forum buddy, or mentor, do so. If you have a partner, they will be your greatest champion. You may be understandably reluctant to disclose the limerence to them, but it will work really well if your partner is emotionally resilient. It builds trust, frames the limerence as a problem you will jointly solve, and relieves you of the need to be evasive or dishonest. Whoever you pick, having a champion who *Knows* will bolster your willpower.

□ 5. ALTER YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Once you are caught in the limerence trap, it becomes apparent that lots of things in your environment remind you of LO. Maybe it's a song, a gift of theirs you keep on your desk, the coffee cup that you always take to the cafe when you meet with them, or the parking space you always try to get next to them. It quickly becomes apparent that the environment is full of cues: places, times or objects that remind you of them. Your goal is to stop thinking about them. So, change your environment. Change your routines, change your desk decorations, change the music you listen to. Shake things up.

□ 6. ATTACK THE HABIT CYCLE

Thinking about LO, seeking LO, organising your schedule around LO – these have become habits that need to be changed. As with step 5, do everything you can to disrupt your old routines and start new ones. Read "The Power of Habit" by Charles Duhigg, for a fascinating account of how much of our behaviour is governed by subconscious routines. Step 5 helps reduce cues, now you need to identify and derail the routines that lead to LO-seeking behaviour.

□ 7. PREPARE FOR WITHDRAWAL PAINS

No one easily shakes off an established habit that once gave extraordinary pleasure. Your brain will resist your attempts to go no contact, because it craves the dopamine hit that you used to get from being with LO and thinking about LO. You have to be prepared for this. Resistance is inevitable. When it comes, remind yourself that this is an old mental routine that is no longer fit for purpose. LO is not a source of pleasure anymore. They are a dependency that you need to break. Withdrawal pains are the last gasp of a failed attempt to bond with someone inappropriate.

□ 8. PREPARE FOR LONELINESS

The other major pain associated with no contact is loneliness. LO was likely a source of friendship, emotional support, energy, laughter, and excitement – or at least they once were, even if the limerence has now progressed to be a burden rather than a thrill. They have been the centre of your internal and external world for some time. They will leave a hole in your life. This is a sacrifice you have to make, but it would be wise to anticipate the sadness that comes with it. Prepare for this by seeking new friends, new hobbies, and new (healthier) sources of fulfillment.

□ 9. PROTECT AGAINST BACKSLIDING

Withdrawal pains, loneliness and the desire for one last fix are formidable foes. Relying on willpower alone to stay true to your course is risky. When resistance comes, draw on the resources you've prepared to help prevent backsliding: seek support from your champion, configure your environment to reflect the change in mindset you are crafting, and throw yourself into new activities that will make you think of the future, rather than the LO-tainted past.

□ 10. ENJOY YOUR FREEDOM

Limerence wears off eventually. Following this checklist should speed up that process and help you dodge the commonest pitfalls. The final step is to look forward to that freedom. A future awaits in which this period is a memory: a painful but instructive experience that taught you new things about life and love and your own emotional makeup. Once free, it's good to take some time to luxuriate in your liberty.

