

5 Things You Need to Know About Relapse

People in recovery and their families are often terrified of relapse. Understanding the following 5 points may help.

1. **Relapse is common.** Although relapses are not inevitable, they are common. Many people have one or more relapses before achieving long-lasting sobriety or abstinence. This does not mean the end of efforts toward abstinence and recovery. The person needs to get back into treatment and the family needs to continue attending a support group, professional counseling, or both.
2. **Work together to prevent relapse.** People in recovery may have frequent urges to drink or use drugs, and feel guilty about it, even though these urges are a normal part of recovery. It's important to work together to anticipate high-risk situations (such as a party where alcohol will be served) and plan ways to prevent them.
3. **Relapse can happen during good times, too.** Sometimes relapse occurs when the person is doing well with their recovery. He or she feels healthy, confident, and/or "cured" and believes that he or she is ready to go back to casual, regular or "controlled" use of drugs or alcohol. The person may remember the honeymoon period of their use (even though it may have been long ago) — where his or her use didn't cause problems and may want to return to that place. But this is often impossible since addiction changes the physical makeup of the brain and the person in recovery is no longer able to use drugs or alcohol in a controlled fashion.
4. **If relapse occurs.** Medical professionals, particularly those who specialize in substance use disorders, are an extremely important asset during a time of relapse. They can help the person learn techniques for containing feelings, focusing on the present, and making use of support from others. Relying on group support from Twelve Step programs, engaging in prayer or meditation, and finding other ways to stay on an even keel can also be extremely helpful.
5. **Learn from relapse.** Experts have found that a relapse can serve as an important opportunity for the recovering person and other family members to identify what triggered the relapse in the first place — and find ways to avoid it in the future.