



RELAPSE & RECOVERY

Relapse comes when a chemically dependent person returns to drinking or drugs after a period of sobriety. Many people suffer one or more relapses, which interrupt their recovery. Some never recover, but others learn from the experience and make more effective efforts to stay sober. Relapses are usually preceded by weeks, months or even years of irrational thinking in which the chemically dependent person becomes more and more like his old drinking or drug-taking self. Sobriety depends on the constant maintenance of new attitudes and responses to life. If these are neglected, the old attitudes often creep back and lead to a relapse. Fortunately, relapses can be prevented if the danger is recognized early enough. If a relapse does occur, people can return to sobriety.

RECOGNIZING DANGER

Relapses tend to occur in circumstances involving old habits and attitudes, high stress or neglect of recovery programs. Certain situations are especially dangerous, particularly holidays, special occasions, unexpected successes, and time periods about three months, one year and five years after becoming sober. If you're in recovery, you can decrease your danger of relapse by noting these times and making a special effort to seek out support for your sobriety during them.

People, places or events may also contribute to a relapse. Take a moment to identify people who don't support your sobriety and might "help" you backslide, and places and events that make you think of drinking or drug-taking. Then avoid them. Here are some other signs that can also signal danger of a relapse:

- depression, loneliness or preference for being alone**
- cockiness about recovery or drug use**
- feeling unappreciated for one's efforts at recovery**
- anxiety or nervousness**
- anger or argumentativeness**
- impatience or frustration**
- unrealistic desires**
- self-pity**
- dishonesty**
- exhaustion**
- inability to think clearly**
- nightmares or insomnia**
- persistently clinging to a social life or friends that don't support sobriety**
- use of a mood-altering chemical**
- neglecting recovery program participation**
- neglecting prayer, meditation or other spiritual practice**
- expecting others to change their habits**
- forgetting to notice good changes or accomplishments**
- believing that you have all the answers**
- believing that relapse can't happen to you**

PREVENTION AND COPING

Preventing a relapse requires an ongoing effort to detect danger signals, avoid dangerous circumstances and practice habits and attitudes that strengthen sobriety. Your best bet is to be a regular participant in recovery programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. You may also have access to aftercare programs through a dependency treatment center. Your employee assistance program can refer you to these and other possibilities.

You can also agree to check yourself weekly for relapse danger signals with the help of a trusted friend and the list shown above. If you believe you're in danger, ask for extra help from your recovery program. Remember to make sobriety your first priority in life.

What if you've already had a relapse? Still, the best course is to participate regularly in a recovery program. You may be embarrassed or even ashamed to admit that you had a relapse. But remember, others have been there before you and returned to sobriety. Relapse is not the end of the world. It's just another one of the challenges of recovering from chemical dependency.