

# RELAPSE PREVENTION ESSENTIALS

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Life after addiction can sometimes feel like an uphill battle, but you're never alone. Knowing how to prevent potential relapses from happening can play a crucial role when it comes to recovery.

The first step in developing excellent relapse prevention skills is understanding what sparks those destructive behaviors. Once you've figured out how to avoid the underlying actions, and becomes a much easier path to recovery.

Let's take a look at some of the essential ways you can promote relapse prevention, so you can go back to enjoying the life you've worked so hard to achieve.

## What Is Relapse Prevention? And Why is it Important?

Recovering from addiction is more than just withdrawing from substance abuse. Some underlying behaviors and actions typically lead to the path of addiction that must be acknowledged and inevitably changed.

Relapse prevention can most easily be described as methods and tools to reduce the possible chances of a relapse.

Potential relapses are a harsh reality for individuals in recovery, which is what makes prevention so important. Knowing the signs of likely relapse and addressing them at their onset can play a vital role in staying on the healthy path to recovery.

Due to the more profound role addiction plays in an individual's life, initial recovery can often be considered the most difficult. Having an early understanding of relapse prevention can make the path to recovery significantly more comfortable.

## Relapse Prevention Theory and Therapy

Understanding what underlying causes can influence a potential relapse is an essential skill in the toolset of relapse prevention. More often than not, substance abuse stems from an individual's coping mechanism trying to cope with the challenges they face throughout life.

### How the Theory Works

Understanding the "why" is only part of the battle. Individuals who suffer from substance abuse disorder (SUB) often lack the skill set needed to deal with life challenges properly. To deal with these situations, the individual must first learn the necessary skills to cope more healthily.

In most of the assorted Relapse Prevention models, it's important to remember the motivation to stop their destructive behavior is assumed. In other words, Relapse Prevention theory only works when the individual wants to stop their destructive behavior.

As the individuals gain more successful experiences in relation to recovery, they'll see an overall increase in their confidence and beliefs to recover effectively. Each time they successfully overcome a situation where there is potential for relapse, they come out on the other side much more substantial.

#### How Therapy Helps Based on This Theory

Relapse Prevention Therapy is a cognitive-behavioral based therapy used to help guide individuals through addiction and substance abuse. While it can also be used to help treat depression and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Relapse Prevention Therapy is best known for its ability to help individuals who struggle with substance abuse disorder (SUB).

Relapse Prevention Therapy aims to highlight situations where an individual is most vulnerable to relapse and help develop better-coping strategies to prevent them.

When an individual knows what causes, or triggers, their addictive behavior, it's easier to learn the skills needed to choose better coping mechanisms to deal with said triggers.

#### Relapse Prevention Strategies You Should Know

Knowing what strategies you should focus on is a crucial component when it comes to preventing potential relapses from occurring. The more you know about how to avoid a relapse, the better you'll be able to handle those situations as they come.

#### Know What Triggers Your Relapse Thoughts

One of the biggest influencers of relapse is referred to as triggers. Triggers can be both external or internal and present themselves in different ways for different people.

Internal triggers can be certain moods or mood swings that change your mindset. A worse development in your anxiety or a notable lowering of self-esteem can both be considered internal triggers for relapse.

External triggers can be most easily defined as the world around you. Whether it's certain situations and places, or even specific people; These external forces can cause these potential relapse triggers.

Knowing what causes your triggers and making a note of them can be a huge help when it comes to relapse prevention. They'll serve as a reminder to stay away from situations or mindsets that can make you feel like a relapse is imminent.

### Deep Breathing Exercises and Meditation

While you can use many different grounding techniques to a better position, your headspace, deep breathing, and meditation can help you recenter yourself. Focusing on your breathing will help divert your attention and help influence your mindset to relax.

Meditation is another excellent strategy for relapse prevention that you can use every day. There are many forms of meditation, but you should focus on what's known as Mindfulness Meditation. Instead of avoiding the thoughts of relapse, you'll learn to accept them as they come. This can be considered a difficult skill to master, but worth dedicating your time.

### Visualize Your Potential Outcomes

If you find yourself face to face with a potential relapse, focus on how the situation will play out. If you decide to use it again, what will happen? Who will be affected? Is it worth it? Compare it to what will happen if you continue to stay sober and the benefits that come with it.

Laying out the positivity that recovery has brought you can be a significant influencer as well. Visualize the hard work you'd be throwing away if you relapse, and ask yourself if one moment is worth throwing away the hard work you've accomplished this far. A relapse should never make you feel like your journey has been pointless, but it serves as a significant influence in your decision-making process.

### Make Yourself a Notebook

While writing isn't for everyone, many individuals have found success in writing down their experiences. Whether you document actual events or just jot down whatever comes to mind, writing can play a powerful role in fighting a potential relapse.

If you write down your experiences, you'll provide yourself with a point of reference that can become an invaluable resource in times of stress or anxiety. Reflecting on similar times you've experienced can help you get through a different potential relapse moment when you need it most.

### Schedule Your Days Out

Preventing yourself from having too much "free time" is an excellent tool in relapse prevention. Often, individuals find themselves relapsing during bouts of boredom that could have easily been avoided by filling the time with something else.

Put together a calendar of sorts that helps you mitigate your time so there are fewer periods of boredom. This way, you can look forward to the next moment on your itinerary instead of focusing on how bored you are.

### Make Yourself a Small List of Contacts

If you ever find yourself in a situation where relapse is likely, having a list of emergency contacts can be a handy tool in relapse prevention. This list should consist of individuals you

can lean on for support and help you get through your cravings. Family and friends make great options for your emergency contact list, and more often than not, they would be happy to help you through a potential relapse.

#### Take Care of Yourself (HALT)

By now, you've heard the acronym HALT. HALT stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired; Better known as the most common symptoms that appear before a relapse. Noticing moments in your day where you may feel some of these is a crucial tool to prevent a potential relapse.

Recite HALT throughout your day, and take a mental inventory. Ensure you're eating correctly, and make sure you've created a structured sleeping schedule for yourself. Making sure to take part in light exercise throughout the day can help if you're having difficulty falling asleep at night.

Pay attention to your mood, and recenter if you find yourself anxious or angry. Surrounding yourself with support and friendship in times of loneliness can significantly impact preventing potential relapses. If you're feeling lonely, make a connection with someone, or reach out to one of your emergency contacts just to talk.

#### Find New Passions and Hobbies

Recovery doesn't always have to be about actively avoiding relapse; there can be passive elements too. Replacing your substance abuse with a newfound hobby can help lead to a significantly lower chance of relapse in individuals.

Find something to do with your hands or even something that challenges your mind. Spend your time learning something new, and maybe you'll find yourself too busy to think about potential relapse. The less free time you have, the less time your mind has spent fighting those intrusive thoughts.

#### Make New Friends and Replace Your Hangouts

For many people in recovery, it can be vital to cut ties with your old life. The less you expose yourself to situations in which relapse is possible, the more likely you will continue your path to recovery. Spending time with people who you also use to do drugs with can be an excruciatingly powerful trigger for many and should be avoided at all cost.

If people or locations are triggers for you, it's best to avoid them at all costs. Instead, develop new relationships and choose new places to spend your time. While it can be difficult to change habitual behavior, consider it an essential tool in preventing potential relapses.

#### Utilize Support Groups

Whether you've been sober for one day or ten years, support groups play a vital role in relapse prevention. Support groups like Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous can help provide you with a better understanding of how to work through a potential relapse situation.

Support groups can help reduce any feelings of loneliness or isolation you may have on your recovery journey. You'll surround yourself with people who know what you're going through and can give you some support through more difficult times.

#### Develop a Relapse Prevention Plan and Stick to It

Human beings are creatures of habit, and using any of the skills mentioned above in combination can be a great way to prevent relapse. When you discover what works best for you, stick to your plan, and remember the steps you set. The more you're prepared for a moment of potential relapse, the better chance you can come out on the other side stronger and better experienced.

Keep in mind, over time, you may have to change your methods. Sometimes, the methods you used when you first started your recovery journey will slowly lose their effectiveness. This is okay; What matters is that you notice this degradation of efficacy and change your relapse prevention plan to one that's more effective for you.

#### Stay Informed, Stay Vigilant, and Stay Healthy

Your recovery journey doesn't have to be difficult, and proper Relapse prevention techniques can play an essential role. Understand what makes a useful relapse prevention tool and is only as effective as you allow it to be. Surround yourself with support, and educate them on these Relapse Prevention Essentials, so you can get back to enjoying the life you've worked so hard to obtain.