The 3 Stages of Addiction Relapse: Emotional, Mental & Physical

Many triggers can cause a recovering addict to relapse. This is why our addiction treatment program emphasizes the importance of relapse prevention support.

To learn more about relapse prevention, call 720.891.4657.

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Drug and alcohol relapse may not be what you think it is.

Instead of a singular event, relapse is a gradual process that can actually begin days or weeks before the consumption of drugs or alcohol. Typically, addiction relapse begins on an emotional level. From there it can progress into the mental stage where you may find yourself actively fantasizing, rationalizing or falling back into the same destructive thought processes that led you to abuse substances in the past.

If you can learn how to identify the emotional and mental precursors of a relapse into addiction, you may be able prevent it from progressing to the final stage – the physical use of alcohol or other drugs.

**STAGE 1**

**Emotional Relapse: Identifying and Coping with Your Feelings**

Life is a series of ups and downs. As a recovering addict, how you cope with difficult circumstances can either set you up for continued sobriety or it can set the stage for relapse. When you were actively using alcohol or other drugs, substances may have provided you with a seemingly effective, although temporary, escape from depression, anxiety and stress. Now that you’re sober, you’ll need to practice the coping techniques you learned during rehabilitation.

However, if you aren’t paying attention to your feelings, it’s easy for your emotions to sneak up on you. That’s why it’s important to spend time each day reflecting on your experiences and processing how you really feel about them. Believe it or not, people don’t always know when or why something is making them feel angry, disappointed or stressed out. So, unless you make a point to sort through your feelings on a regular, even daily basis, you could be completely unaware that these emotions are present.

7 Healthy Coping Skills for Preventing Relapse

Only after successfully recognizing your emotions can you begin using healthy coping techniques to work through them. As a reminder, healthy coping skills could include the following:

- Talking to someone you trust
- Writing down your thoughts
- Remembering the big picture
- Listening to music
- Practicing meditation
- Reaching out to your sponsor
- Attending a support group meeting

Everyone copes differently, so don’t feel like you must choose a technique from this list. The important part is not in **HOW** you choose to cope but recognizing **WHEN** you need to cope.

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Mental Relapse: Breaking Free of Destructive Thoughts

It’s normal to think about using again. That doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to relapse. At first, these thoughts might be fleeting and somewhat easy to push out of your mind. But, if you remain in the mental relapse stage for too long without taking action, the addictive centers in your brain may become more activated, intensifying your cravings and your triggers to use again.

Before long, you may find yourself bargaining, skipping meetings and therapy sessions, putting yourself in risky situations where substance are being used by others – or worse, mentally planning out your relapse in advance. But, there’s good news. Even at this stage, physical relapse is still avoidable if you can recognize what’s going on and take action to stop the relapse in its tracks.

Tips for Surviving Mental Relapse

While all of the proven healthy coping skills still apply, at this stage of the relapse process, you may need an immediate intervention... a distraction from your destructive thoughts. If the thought of using becomes too great to ignore, try the following:

- **Talk a walk** – Burning off some energy and getting plenty of fresh air can help you recalibrate and give you time to see the big picture.
- **Change your scenery** – A unique environment can help take your mind off of your cravings so you can reflect on the consequence of relapsing after all of your hard work.
- **Share your feelings** – This is why sponsors, support groups and loved ones are such an important component of any recovering addict’s long-term sobriety plan.

You aren’t the only one who has experienced these thoughts, so don’t feel like you have to deal with them alone. As difficult as the mental relapse stage may be, it’s much easier to resolve than a full-blown physical relapse. The important thing to remember is that while physical relapse is a possibility among recovering addicts, it is not unavoidable.
So you’ve suffered a relapse into substance abuse. How did it happen? Will it happen again? What should you do next? The first thing you need to understand is that your relapse experience probably began days, weeks or even months ago.

As previously mentioned, relapse is a gradual process that often starts with a series of triggers, like disappointments in your relationships, rejections or feeling disconnected. From there your emotions may have led you to mentally rationalize the use of substances as a coping mechanism. The next thing you know, you’ve reverted back to your drug abuse ritual.

But, all is not lost. Addiction may be a chronic disease and relapse could be another challenge you’ll need to overcome as a recovering alcoholic or drug addict. In this post, we’ll show you what you can do next to minimize the effects of relapse and get back on the road to recovery.

What To Do After Relapse?

If you’ve experienced a relapse, it’s normal to feel shame, disappointment, helplessness or hopelessness. You may even feel intense anger toward yourself for allowing your addiction to take control of your behavior after all of your hard work. Here’s what to do next:

Forgive but Don’t Forget
Nobody is perfect, including you. Despite our best intentions, mistakes can and often do happen on the road to long-term recovery from addiction. This doesn’t make you a bad person. It makes you a human. Dwelling on this particular failure is not only unfair, it can lead you to an even worse place. So, instead of fixating all of your energy on your relapse, recognize it as the valuable learning experience it really is and use the information objectively to evaluate where you are and what assistance you need.
Identify the Cause of Your Relapse

As we’ve discussed in previous posts, a physical relapse is not a singular event. It’s a process with a beginning, middle and end. Take the time to reflect on the sequence of events that may have led you down a path to relapse. These are precisely the issues that you can explore and correct in therapy in an effort to interrupt your cycle.

For example, your relapse could be an indication that you became too complacent in your recovery. Maybe it’s time to attend support meetings more regularly, or begin individual or group therapy. Maybe you began bottling your emotions and did not use healthy coping skills. Or maybe you need to distance yourself from old acquaintances who continue to abuse substances.

Be Honest with Yourself

On the other hand, your relapse could be an indication that you never truly reached the acceptance stage of grieving your addiction. If this is the case, you may need to seek professional help again so you can identify and explore solutions to these unresolved contributing factors. That’s ok. What’s not ok is depriving yourself of a chance at long-term sobriety.

Relapse Prevention at The Raleigh House

Many triggers can cause a recovering addict to relapse. This is why our addiction treatment program emphasizes the importance of relapse prevention support. Aside from strengthening your family support system and teaching you healthy coping skills, The Raleigh House will:

• **Recommend local therapists and 12-step programs:** This further strengthens your emotional support network after you successfully complete our 90-day program.

• **Work with employers to get you back to work sooner:** This gives you something to focus on other than drugs and alcohol, boosts your self-confidence and helps you feel more productive.

• **Provide nutritional and exercise programs:** Our specialists will provide you with a diet and exercise routine that relieves stress, fights depression and supports long-lasting sobriety.

If you’re concerned about relapsing or if you’ve recently started abusing alcohol or drugs again, call us now. Don’t wait until things get any worse. Our addiction specialists are standing by to help.

**Call Us Today – 720-891-4657**

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