

Relapse Prevention Examined

By Jim Rachels



For my personal relapse prevention, I did a number of things. I believe the first and possibly the most important thing which is education. I believe educating yourself about your disorder will help tremendously. I also believe heavily in self-reflection and meditation. I credit those things with really helping me not only get on the right track but keep me on the right track.

Relapse can happen to anyone at any time. It doesn't matter if you have one week, one year or one decade. Research shows that 40-60% of people in recovery have at least one lapse or relapse during their recovery. This does not mean that these people have failed at recovery, far from it. They are building up experience that might actually help them later on in their recovery or may even help someone else someday. These numbers are quite high if you ask me.

Also having a relapse prevention plan can be an extremely important tool in the toolbox to fight relapse. The plan offers a course of action for responding to triggers and cravings. This can be a written document. It is something that you will turn to in those tough times during recovery.

Relapse can be especially dangerous for someone who has not used in a long time. Those who have been in recovery for a lengthy amount of time will lose their tolerance for the drug of abuse, and taking the amount they were accustomed to consuming during the height of their abuse could result in overdose and even death.

But these numbers show there is a huge problem with the ways we have been helping people stay sober. If it's only working on around half the people in recovery we are doing some things wrong. Nothing will ever be one hundred percent and I know that. But based on these numbers I think there is probably a lot more we can do and a lot more progress to make in the field of addiction and recovery and to battle these things.

Relapse prevention is something that all recovering addicts should be familiar with. They should learn to see the warning signs and ways to handle these situations. If you're going to be facing the battle of addiction you might as well have all the tools and weapons available as needed to fight this.

So let's look out just how and why relapse prevention is so important to us addicts in recovery. Let's also look at what relapse prevention means to you.

To me, relapse prevention is a system of techniques and routines as well as education that one can engage in to prevent relapse. First and foremost our sobriety should come first in our lives. Without it we have nothing. It will always lead you down a dark road if you let it.

So let's start from when you're most vulnerable. This is typically when you first get sober. When you are newly sober most of us are going to be going through some kind of discomfort mentally and physically. I do have to admit that I have been totally lucky. I say that I have been lucky for the sole reason is that after that I have not had one craving for drugs alcohol whatsoever. Check that, I have craved cigarettes which I think are a drug. In this regard, I am extremely lucky so far and I know that and I understand that this is something that could change at any given moment. In the blink of an eye things can change dramatically. It's been proven time and time again with us addicts.

I think a huge part of being able to stay sober is to be able to identify the beginning stages of a relapse. So let's look at the stages of relapse.

Emotional relapse is the stage where you stop caring for yourself. At this point, you are not thinking about using yet. Most will remember their last relapse and will be trying anything they can to prevent another one.

Here are some of the warning signs of an emotional relapse:
Anxiety, isolation, anger, keeping your feelings to yourself, not participating in treatment, poor eating and sleeping habits and overall lack of self-care.

What should I do? Recognize that you need to change your behaviors and practice self-care. This includes talking to someone about these emotions, exercise regularly, eating three healthy meals every day, trying to get eight hours of sleep every night, taking care of yourself and finding healthy activities that keep you around others.

After a prolonged period of not caring for ourselves, this will eventually lead to the next stage of relapse, mental relapse. With mental relapse, there is a constant battle taking place inside your head. This is the stage where you start to think about using again. You may even start to plan your own relapse or start looking for ways to relapse, you might glamourize past use and downplay the severity of it. In plain terms, we are in denial.

Then we have the final stage which is the physical relapse. Which is the actual action of ingesting or acting out you're compulsive behavior. It is the stage at which for the moment we have lost this battle. But remember just because you lost the battle does not mean you lost the war. This is something where you must get back on your feet and dust yourself off and keep moving forward.

These are the stages of a relapse. I can't emphasize enough how important it is for you to be familiar with these stages of relapse. You never know what may or may not trigger you and you have to know how to handle it and handle it sober. Also besides handling something sober it is also about staying sober no matter what life throws your way.

Then there is also the issue of shame when you relapse. There is no need for this. Sometimes for some people, a lapse or a relapse is just part of their journey. Everyone is different. I think shame and embarrassment can give someone the excuse to continue on with their abuse. It also makes them more likely to relapse again I believe.

To help get you sober and keep you sober I believe community is one of the strongest tools in our arsenal we have to help ourselves and each other out. Community is one of the Four Pillars of the Addicts Anonymous program. With the right support in place, many things are possible for you in your recovery. Recovery becomes that much easier when you are able to surround yourself with the right people. There will never be a point in your addiction where isolation is the answer. When it comes to recovery community is always something that will only help you.

All in all relapse prevention can be a tricky thing. It could happen to anyone out of nowhere. It is something that each and every one of us addicts needs to be vigilant about and constantly be on the lookout for any signs or symptoms of an impending relapse. In the end, we are all responsible for ourselves and need to act accordingly.