

Stages of Relapse

Addiction is a chronic disease; therefore, relapse is considered a common aspect of the disease. NIDA, The National Institute on Drug Abuse, relates the relapse rate of addiction similar to those of other chronic diseases such as asthma, hypertension and diabetes, estimating it to be between 40 and 60 percent.

RELAPSE DOES NOT MEAN FAILURE.

Understanding the process of relapse is key in establishing your path to recovery. Relapse can be divided into 3 stages and the earlier you are able to identify and begin using healthy coping skills the more likely you are to see success.

THE THREE STAGES

1. **Emotional Relapse:** This stage is defined by poor self-care. It occurs before one starts thinking about using.

Warning signs: anxiety, isolation, anger, keeping your feelings to yourself, not participating in treatment, poor eating and sleeping habits

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, eat three healthy meals every day, try to get 8 hours of sleep every night, practice good hygiene and find healthy activities that keep you around others.

2. **Mental Relapse:** Think of this stage as a war of the mind; part of them wants to use and part of them doesn't.

Warning signs: thinking about people you used to use with, places and things that remind you of when you used, glamorizing past use, lying, thinking that you can use just once, and planning a relapse

What should I do? Tell someone; a loved one or a professional about your urges. Identify high risk situations and create a plan to avoid use. Evidence based therapy can help you find ways to distract you from your thoughts or help restructure the thought pattern. Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation.

3. **Physical Relapse:** When the individual starts using again.

This is the stage people usually refer to when they think of relapse. The negative emotions have become overwhelming and a lack of coping skills have led to unhealthy thoughts that justify use and finally you have sought out and used the substance.

What should I do? Don't give up. Get help immediately and be honest about your relapse. Take time to understand the emotional and mental stages that occur before the physical relapse. Learn which emotions and thoughts led here and how to avoid these or how to cope in the future.

Rather than viewing a brief relapse as a failure, treat it as a challenge and try to get back on track as soon as possible.

Sources:

- (1) [Relapse Prevention and the Five Rules of Recovery. Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine. 2015 Sept; 88\(3\).](#)
- (2) [Treatment and Recovery. National Institute on Drug Abuse.](#)