

AVOID SLIPS AND RELAPSES

Stopping is easy but “staying stopped” requires more effort and work. Old friends will try to contact you and previous stressors and situations will resurface. In these situations, the temptation to revert to your old ways will be stronger than before.

To avoid slips and relapses, you need to equip yourself with the skills to maintain abstinence. These include learning to recognise warning signs and situations of relapse, manage high-risk situations and set goals for recovery.

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RELAPSE PREVENTION



Now that you have stopped your substance use or behavioural addiction, the next step towards recovery would be to maintain abstinence.

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Stages of Relapse

Even before slipping into the physical act of a relapse, it is likely that an emotional or a mental relapse may have already been brewing in your mind.

In an emotional relapse, you are not thinking about using the substance, but your emotions and behaviours are setting you up for a possible relapse. In a mental relapse, you are fighting a battle in your mind, where part of you wants to remain abstinent but part of you wants to return to the addiction.

Recognising Warning Signs and Situations

Sometimes, certain situations can lead you right back to your addiction problems. By recognising the signs and situations below, you can take the appropriate measures to manage them:

- Fantasising or thinking about past addictions (e.g. drug or alcohol use)
- Thinking about places, people or events that remind you of your past addictions
- Lying to yourself or others in order to do what you know you should not be doing
- Keeping alcohol, drugs or items related to your specific addiction around the house
- Feeling overconfident, stressed or bored
- Isolating yourself e.g. being absent from support group meetings or avoiding contact with your fellow patients who have made strides in their own recovery
- Dwelling on past hurts and resentments
- Having a lot of cash on hand e.g. pay day



Managing High-risk Situations

- Use thought-stopping techniques

Rubber band snap

Keep a rubber band around your wrist; pull the band away from your skin and let it snap back when you notice negative self-talk. The slight pain from the rubber band snapping will serve as a slightly negative consequence that will make you more aware of your thoughts, and also help to stop them.

Visualisation

Replace negative or pessimistic thoughts with positive and pleasurable ones. The idea is to distract the mind from an obsessive state to a calmer state of being.

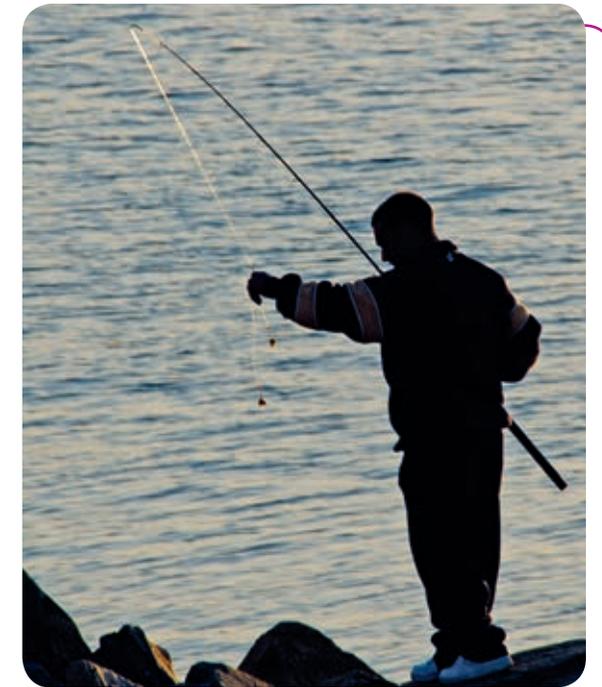
Call someone

Calling someone and talking to another person can provide you with the outlet you need for your feelings and also allow you to better hear your own thinking process in order to avoid a relapse.

- Avoid contacting old friends who are associated with the addiction. You can choose to:
 - Change your phone number or delete their contact numbers
 - Avoid saying more than a “Hello” if you meet them
- Avoid places where you used to frequent to get your fix.

Set Recovery Goals

- Set your recovery goals and draw up a timeline to achieve them:
 - Short-term goals
 - Mid-term goals
 - Long-term goals
- Be specific
 - e.g. Instead of just setting a general goal to limit your access to money, set a specific goal like enlisting the help of your partner to collect your salary or cancelling your credit cards or ATM cards in order to stop gambling.
- Be realistic
 - e.g. Wanting to achieve sobriety in just one day after seeking treatment may not be a realistic goal.
- Set a start date and allocate a time frame to attain the goal
 - e.g. Begin with the end in mind by setting a quit date for your addiction. This helps you to have a more concrete plan on how you can take action and work towards your quit date.



Useful Tips

- Be honest with yourself and your family
- Keep your appointments with your doctor, counsellor and support group
- Keep yourself occupied with your work, family and exercise
- To lead a structured life:
 - Wake up and go to bed at the same time everyday
 - Eat proper meals
 - Follow schedules
- Have your pay deposited into the account of someone you trust

If you have any questions or would like learn more about relapse management, talk to our counsellor or doctor today.