

Sticking to Your Recovery Program from Addictive Disease

If you are a recovering alcoholic or drug addict, everything important to you may hinge on your ability to achieve sobriety. You may have heard that relapse is a part of recovery. It's true, but this does not mean that relapse is going to happen or should happen. Relapse is dangerous because there is no way to predict if you will return to sustained abstinence, and if so, when. Here are a few tips for success:

Get Started on the Right Path



■ **To avoid relapse, you must be vigilant and actively involved in a 12-step recovery program.** These programs—Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, etc., are spiritual, not religious programs. They work best for most people. So it is common sense to give them your best shot. In the beginning of recovery, the risk of relapse is highest, so following instructions offered by these programs is critical.

■ Some of the recommendations offered to newcomers include committing to 90 meetings in 90 days, getting a sponsor, finding a home group, attending a variety of meetings, and working the first three steps of the 12-step program.



■ **Relapse Triggers Are Ever Present:** You may struggle with relapse triggers—people, places, things, or thoughts that can stimulate the urge to drink or use drugs. Identifying, recognizing, and avoiding these triggers is an acquired skill and it's a vital step in gaining time away from your last drink. This allows recovery to take place.

■ **Understanding Complacency:** When a recovering person becomes complacent, they lose an appreciation for how easy it is to relapse. They no longer fear the illness. Abstinence alone does not cure addictive disease. It only stops its progression.



■ **Stopping 12-step Meetings—Don't Do It:** Discovering that you have no urge to drink or use drugs can fool you into a false sense of security. Stopping AA meetings is often the next step when this happens. Decreasing the number of meetings means that you are no longer treating your illness. Bond to your AA group by arriving at meetings early, staying late, and acquiring new friendships with those you respect and who "have what you want"—quality sobriety and serenity in their lives.

Controlled Drinking—Forget It



■ **Complete Abstinence:** Complete is the only way to recover from addictive disease (even if you do know someone's uncle who "succeeded" in doing it some other way!) Research and science don't support controlled use. That's because metabolizing alcohol or drugs reactivates the disease. Twelve-step groups are total abstinence programs. You won't stick around long if you're experimenting with controlled drinking, and you'll never find a sponsor to support you, which is a key element in a recovery program likely to succeed.

■ **Why Relapse Happens:** Will you be successful? Ask yourself, "How involved am I in my recovery program?" Stay away from things that interfere with your recovery, and do things that support it. Relapses are often associated with emotional states, especially "hunger," "anger," "loneliness," and feeling "tired" (HALT). They can prompt an urge to drink. So make a healthier "you" a key part of your recovery program. You will be easier to avoid "stinking thinking,"—destructive thoughts, and rationalizations that precede the behavior or relapse.



■ **Learn from the Lessons of Others Before You:** Twelve-step meetings aren't just about abstinence and sobriety. You will also learn a tremendous amount about life, emotional common sense, or "right thinking." It is possible that someone you admire greatly or rely upon as a role model will relapse. This is frightening and disheartening, but don't make it an excuse to drink or use drugs again. It is a setback for them, not you.

■ **Growing in Sobriety:** Sobriety represents a degree of quality in your abstinent lifestyle. Recovery is the process of acquiring sobriety "one day at a time." Putting your sobriety first allows you to get the things you want in life, including happier relationships with those you love. And it is worth it.

How the EAP Can Help

Your employee assistance program has expertise in guiding recovering persons even if the professional with whom you work is not in recovery themselves. Rely upon them for tips in managing your recovery program, keeping you honest with yourself about your behavior, and helping you celebrate the anniversaries and "birthdays" sure to come as you put your sobriety first.