

RELAPSE PREVENTION IN ADDICTION

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Abstract: Relapse is the recurrence of a prior condition, usually representing a negative connotation such as the return of an illness after a period of improvement, or also, in the context of substance abuse, the re-initiation of drug seeking behaviors and the resumption of use after a period of abstinence. Many individuals who make it into addiction recovery will relapse within the first few months. Relapse prevention techniques include any tool that can be used to avoid a return to substance abuse. Different triggers have been identified as possible precursors for relapse. By identifying these triggers, it has become possible to develop prevention techniques which can be used to combat each of them. There are many possibilities about what the individual can include in their relapse prevention toolbox.

Key words: Relapse addictions, Meditation, Abstinence.

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Warning Signs of Relapse

Denying vulnerability to relapse, thinking you are cured of the addiction, and letting down your guard. (It only takes one more dose to get back into the addiction cycle no matter

how far or how long you have progressed in your recovery and abstinence.)

Making excuses for resuming use such as reasoning with yourself or others for your need of the substance and using defense or denial mechanisms when thoughts or behaviors point toward impending relapse.

Becoming complacent or non-compliant in efforts to maintain abstinence such as not going to 12-Step recovery meetings or participating in treatment.

Idealizing substance abuse effects or past experiences and selectively disregarding the consequences.

Neglecting physical, psychological, spiritual, or emotional health problems.

Boredom and isolation, not engaging in healthy or productive relationships or activities.

Entering high risk situations such as renewing friendships with other substance abusers or staying in environments where reminders of substance abuse are unavoidable.

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Replacing abuse of one substance with another

Overreacting to cravings, emotional distress, or relapse when it occurs (by some estimates relapse occurs in up to 90% of recovering individual and should not be viewed as failure, but rather, as a learning event to prevent future occurrences or to signify a renewed need for treatment.)

Relapse Prevention Techniques

The Risk of Relapse

Many individuals who make it into addiction recovery will relapse within the first few months. This is why there is so much emphasis put on providing relapse prevention techniques to those who are new in recovery. A return to addiction can mean years more of additional suffering. Some individuals will never have another opportunity to quit, and may die as a result of their addiction. By focusing on prevention, the risk of relapse can be greatly reduced.

The Causes of Relapse

It can be hard to understand why an addict would choose to return to their addiction. These individuals will be getting their life back together and should already be experiencing some of the benefits of sobriety. Those who do relapse may be full of remorse. However, there is no guarantee that they will be able to stop again anytime soon. They will usually be unable to provide a justifiable reason for why they decided to return to substance abuse.

Those who fail to adjust to life in sobriety are the most likely to relapse. The individual needs to make more changes to their life than just putting down the alcohol or drugs. These changes will be part of an ongoing process. However, people can get stuck and fail to progress. Those who are not moving forward

in recovery can become disillusioned, and therefore more likely to return to addiction. In many cases, the relapse could have been avoided if the individual made use of prevention techniques.

Types of Relapse Prevention Techniques

Relapse prevention techniques include any tool that can be used to avoid a return to substance abuse. The causes of relapse can be broken down into categories. Prevention techniques have been developed to combat each of these. The three categories of relapse causes are:

Emotional Causes

where the individual returns to addiction because they cannot cope with their thoughts and emotions.

The individual may develop unhealthy patterns of behavior, and this makes them more prone to relapse.

External Situations

It can also increase the likelihood of a relapse. An example of this is when the individual continues to spend a lot of time with substance abusers.

Relapse Triggers

Different triggers have been identified as possible precursors for relapse. By identifying these triggers, it has become possible to develop prevention techniques which can be used to combat each of them. The most common relapse triggers include: The individual can experience overconfidence. This can mean that they are not prepared when things get hard.

Life in recovery can take a bit of getting used and some people may experience periods

of self-pity. This is a dangerous emotion because it can sap motivation.

Those people who have unrealistic expectations can become disappointed.

If the individual behaves dishonestly, it can lead them right back to addiction.

Occasionally, people in recovery will experience periods of depression. This can take a lot of the satisfaction out of sobriety.

Those who continue other types of substance abuse will be increasing their chances of relapse.

Taking recovery for granted leads to complacency. This then means that the individual is no longer doing those things they need to do in order to remain sober.

Prevention at the Different Stages of Relapse
There are also prevention techniques that are suitable for the different stages of a relapse. It is possible to break this down into three stages:

During the emotional stage the individual will be struggling with recovery, but not actually thinking about a return to substance abuse. The most appropriate relapse prevention tools here would be those that can restore emotional equilibrium.

During the mental stage of relapse, the person is thinking about drinking or using drugs again. The urge to return to addiction can be strong. Various techniques are needed to combat this before it is too late.

All is not lost at the relapse stage. If the individual has the right resources, they may

be able to return to the recovery path right away.

The Relapse Prevention Toolbox

It can be helpful to think of relapse prevention techniques as items in a toolbox. The more tools the individual has in the toolbox, the more likely they will be to have the right tool when the need arises. The early months and years in recovery tend to be full of unexpected twists and turns. Preparation can make the journey a lot smoother. The individual can learn to spot the different relapses triggers and use the right tool to get them back on track.

There are many possibilities about what the individual can include in their relapse prevention toolbox. Some of the more common tools include:

12 Step meetings are a good option because attendance can provide the individual with support as well as new strategies. This type of group can be of value at almost any stage of the relapse process.

Counseling sessions can help the individual commit to continued development in recovery. Putting down drink or drugs is usually not enough by itself to make life fully satisfying.

Meditation techniques can be useful for dealing with emotional upheaval in recovery. This does not have to be a sitting practice but could be something such as Tai Chi or yoga.

Group therapy sessions can be a venue for problem solving and support.

Sponsorship is popular in groups like AA.

This means that the newly sober person benefits from the knowledge of someone who has more experience in recovery. The sponsor is a good resource to turn to when things get difficult.

Exercise is good for burning off excess energy and improving physical as well mental health. Those who are new to recovery can overdo it with exercise, but it is a good technique when done in moderation.

Hobbies are important as a source of stress relief. It is vital that people in recovery find new interests to fill up the time they spend drinking or doing drugs.

Writing and journal-keeping can be a useful tool in recovery. It is often claimed that problems seem more manageable when they are written down and not just floating around in the individual's head. Reading back on old entries in a journal can increase motivation by reminding the individual of how far they have come.

Booster sessions are provided by some rehabs to ex-patients. These are well worth attending because they allow the individual to learn new relapse prevention techniques. The sessions are also useful for reinvigorating motivation.

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