

Relapse: To slip or fall back into a former condition, especially after improvement or seeming improvement; specifically (a) to fall back into illness after recovery or seeming recovery; (b) to fall back into bad habits, wrongdoing, error, etc.; to backslide.

In other words, to relapse is to get sick again. In the case of the recovering addict or alcoholic, this means returning to most or all aspects of an addictive lifestyle, not only to using drugs, including alcohol.

3 Types of Relapse:

1. *Therapeutic relapse*: A relapse that scares the person so much, or leads to enough insight, that he or she returns to abstinence and becomes more serious and motivated about staying in recovery.
2. *Pathological relapse*: A relapse that leads to a lasting return to addictive behavior—the person returns to out-of-control substance use.
3. *Fatal relapse*: A relapse that results in death by substance-induced accident, suicide, or overdose, or other results of substance abuse.

PROCESS OF RELAPSE AND EARLY WARNING SIGNS:

The drug use or drink is the completion of the relapse process, not its start. Relapse is the process of returning to an addictive lifestyle. Just as recovery involves changing not only the substance use but other habits, relationships, and patterns of thoughts and feelings, relapse is a change in all these areas back to their addictive versions.

Usually, other changes take place well before the return to actually drinking or using a drug. Those changes can be identified by the recovering person or by others who know what to look for, and used as early warning signs.

The relapse process takes place in several areas of a person's life:

1. *Thoughts and attitudes*: Several changes in mental state can be part of relapse:
 - Increasing denial, minimization, or exaggeration of problems
 - Becoming rigid or obsessive about recovery, or avoiding talking or thinking about it
 - Unrealistic expectations of situations, oneself, and others
 - Becoming apathetic and indifferent
 - Justifying or making excuses for past using/drinking

- Nostalgia about using/drinking—the “good old days” effect
- Thinking about alcohol or another drug more and more of the time

2. *Feelings and moods*: Some changes that mean the risk of relapse in progress is high:

- Increased depression, guilt, self-pity, regrets
- Increased anger at oneself or others, general hostility and irritability—“attitude problem”
- Increased boredom
- Increased euphoria—“pink cloud” effect, not being realistic about challenges or problems
- Increased loneliness
- Loss of self-confidence or a false air of superiority and arrogance

3. *Behaviour changes*: The most visible outward signs of a relapse in progress:

- Quitting or reducing recovery activities: reducing or giving up meeting attendance and so on
- Increasing self-isolation
- Returning to old using activities, places, and people
- Growing dishonesty and secretiveness
- Growing inconsistency, undependability
- Increased complaining
- Creating crises—playing the “drama junkie”
- Rejecting help/concern from friends
- Eating and sleeping patterns becoming irregular again
- Increasing impulsivity