



Patient & Family Guide  
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# Tips to Identify and Prevent a Potential Relapse



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# Tips to Identify and Prevent a Potential Relapse

## What is relapse?

Relapse means that the symptoms you had before being treated have returned or gotten worse. It can also mean not being able to do as much in daily life and activities. Relapse is common for people who have a substance use disorder or a mental disorder. It is even more common for people who have both.

**Relapse does not mean failure.  
Relapse is a chance to learn how  
to better manage your illness.**

The best time to plan for a possible relapse is when symptoms are controlled.

**What are your questions?  
Please ask. We are here to help you.**

## **You can help to prevent a relapse with these relapse prevention steps:**

- Develop healthy lifestyle habits, such as getting enough sleep and eating well.
- Do not misuse drugs or alcohol.
- Have structured days. Stay active but also have time for rest.
- Have meaning in your life.
- Pay attention to your mental health. Talk to friends and family about how you're feeling. Let them help you.
- Take medications as prescribed by your doctor.
- Identify stressors/factors that may lead to the illness getting worse.
- Identify strategies to address these factors.
- Learn to manage situations, people and things that create stress (triggers).
- Identify your individual pattern of relapse, including early warning signs, in the order they tend to happen.
- Develop a plan to monitor these warning signs and take action by implementing your Relapse Prevention Plan. Don't wait for these signs to get worse.
- Use skills learned in treatment and from your past experiences.

**Triggers** are different for each person. Your family and friends can help you identify possible trigger situations. Together you can find ways to:

- Develop coping strategies to deal with situations that cannot be avoided.
- Take steps to deal with problems early.

## **Common triggers of relapse**

Each person will have unique triggers. These are some common triggers:

- › Stopping medication or missing a dose
- › Using alcohol or street drugs
- › Not getting enough sleep
- › Spending too much time alone
- › Setting unrealistic goals
- › Feeling overwhelmed
- › Feeling unable to deal with problems

## **Life stressors**

- › Frightening news or events
- › Family tension or conflict
- › End of a relationship
- › Financial problems
- › Legal problems

The pattern of **early warning signs of relapse** is often unique to each person. It is important to identify the pattern of changes in yourself or your family member when you or they become ill. The earlier you can identify these early warning signs and take action, the better it will help to prevent or minimize a relapse.

Ask your mental health or addictions clinician about the Relapse Prevention Plan. This is a tool that you, your family and friends and your clinician can work on together to help prevent relapse.

This pamphlet is just a guide. Please talk to your health care provider about your questions. We are here to help you.

## **What should I do if my family member or friend has an addiction or a mental illness?**

- Learn about the illness. Understand what happens and how you and your family member or friend can cope with it. Work together on treatment.
- Work together as a family. You and your family may benefit from therapy even if your family member or friend doesn't want to take part.
- Encourage your family member or friend to stay on their care plan and continue their treatment and medications, if any have been prescribed.
- Make a plan with all family members about how to care for your family member or friend when their symptoms are bad, and how they will take care of themselves.
- Remind yourself that it will take time for change to happen.
- Take care of yourself. Stay involved in your own interests.
- Encourage good health habits, like getting enough sleep, exercising and avoiding alcohol and drugs.
- Remind your family member or friend that you love them.

Relapse and recovery are a normal part of any chronic illness, and you and your family and friends can learn to manage these times effectively.

**Looking for more health information?**

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.