

Tips for Avoiding Recurrence

The most important moment before recurrence is not the final decision to use a drug. It is when you decide to expose yourself to stressors. For example, a stressor could be going to a party or hanging out with friends who are getting high. Before encountering your stressors, *you* still have most of the control. Not you are craving.

If you are feeling the urge to use, try to wait it out. If you distract yourself for even 30 minutes, it is likely your craving will lessen in intensity. It might not totally disappear, but it will become easier to resist.

Focus on replacing your past drug use with new positive activities. If you used to go home after school and drink, you will need to make a new plan to occupy yourself. Going home and staring at a wall will eventually lead to staring at a wall with a drink in your hand.

Do not try to do this alone. Sharing your goals for sobriety with a friend makes all the difference. They can hold you accountable when you are making questionable decisions (“I’m just going to the party to hang out, I won’t drink!”) and they can offer a kind ear when you are struggling.

Remind yourself that cravings will pass. Have you ever had that experience when you are sick where you cannot remember what it feels like to *not* be sick? The same thing happens with cravings. Give it time, and believe it or not, the feeling will go away.

You will have to make sacrifices beyond giving up the drug. If you previously used during specific activities (for example: watching a game on TV, going to concerts, or spending time with friends), you may need to make changes. This might mean *not* watching the game or making new friends who are sober. This can be hard, but that is what makes it a sacrifice.

Have a plan for when things get bad, because at some point, they will. People get a bad grade, hearts get broken, and sometimes people leave us forever. Develop a plan to get through these major life challenges--without the use of drugs--before they happen.

Do not become complacent with your sobriety. If you someday consider having “just one drink at a party”, do not make the decision lightly. If you have struggled with addiction in the past, you are much more likely to develop an addiction again.

If you do have a recurrence, do not give up. A lot of people find it helpful to keep track of how long they have been sober, but do not confuse this count with the true goal of leading a good life. If you are at day 100 of sobriety, that is great. However, if you make a mistake and end up back at day 0, know that you are not starting over (you gained knowledge, experience, and confidence). In other words: Slipping up is not a license to go on a binge.

Come up with new rituals. How do you celebrate holidays, graduations, or any other happy occasion? If your answer includes any sort of drug, you will want to get creative and figure out something new. Go wild with a hobby for the day, treat yourself to a nice dinner, or take a weekend trip. Make sure it’s something you can get excited about.