



FIVE RULES TO PREVENT ADDICTION RELAPSE

By Nancy Krames

The road to addiction recovery is not a linear journey from Point A to Point B. Instead, it's more like navigating a roundabout. Unless you're mindful about where you're going and how to get there, you're likely to remain stuck, circling the same path over and over again.

Squaring off with addiction means acknowledging that relapse is a very real possibility and that completing a formal treatment program doesn't put you in the clear.

Preventing relapse requires building on the personal growth you achieved during rehab and being prepared for the obstacles that will inevitably stand in your way. Unless you continue to practice the skills you learned and remain mindful of your recovery goals, you'll be at increased risk of falling back into old, harmful patterns.

FIVE RULES TO PREVENT ADDICTION RELAPSE

The Five Rules of Recovery and Relapse Prevention

In 2015, Dr. Steven M. Melemis - a Toronto-based addiction specialist who has successfully treated patients for more than thirty years - published his recommendations for relapse prevention in the Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine.

Dr. Melemis suggests that there are five clear and easy-to-remember rules that can prevent addiction relapse.^[1]

1) Change Your Life

People put off change because the unknown is scary and it's easier to return to the status quo. But unless you restructure your life to eliminate the people, places, and activities that contributed to your addiction, you'll set yourself up for failure. It will be much easier to avoid using drugs or alcohol when you remove potential triggers.

Yes, it's difficult to retrain your brain to recognize that the activities you once associated with positive feelings no longer serve you. So, at the same time that you eliminate harmful influences, add in supports (family, friends, doctors, counselors, and groups) that can keep you on track and will prioritize what you'll gain by changing rather than what you'll lose.

2) Be Completely Honest

The most damaging lies associated with addiction are not the falsehoods you tell other people. It's lying to yourself, existing in a state of denial, and failing to hold yourself accountable that perpetuates a pattern of destructive behaviors.

You're not fooling anyone - let alone yourself - when you deny you have a problem. You'll continue to feel shame for hiding your addiction. Gradually, your self-esteem will begin to crumble and you'll start to devalue yourself. Soon, you may feel you don't have the strength to get clean. Eventually, you may believe that you don't deserve to be healthy and lead a fulfilling life.

Then, you'll return to using.

Learning to accept full responsibility for your drug or alcohol use and admitting that you have a problem is just as challenging - if not more- than making changes in your life. Taking accountability forces you to confront the root issues of your addiction but also teaches you that you don't have to be ashamed of your illness. Addiction is only a part of you but doesn't define you.

Just as lying was a learned behavior you used and practiced to support your addiction, you may find it difficult to start telling the truth. But once you embrace honesty, you'll feel freer and better equipped to make significant changes in your life.

FIVE RULES TO PREVENT ADDICTION RELAPSE

3) Ask For Help

One of the reasons people relapse after completing a treatment program is that the built-in supports are no longer available. They mistakenly believe they can manage their recovery on their own or are ashamed to admit they need guidance.

It's a good idea to continue individual therapy after treatment. But also make a commitment to join and regularly attend a self-help group. The group dynamic helps you to feel like you're not alone and that you don't have to be embarrassed that you're a recovering addict. You'll likely learn a lot about coping methods from the other members of the group, and it's a safe environment for you to be vulnerable, honest, and get support when you need it.

4) Practice Self-Care

Prior to getting help, you probably used drugs or alcohol to escape, self-medicate, or reward yourself. While in recovery, it's essential to find alternative ways to relax, recharge, and enjoy life.

One of the biggest obstacles to practicing self-care is that many people - especially recovering addicts - don't believe they deserve to be rewarded.

One way to get past this hurdle is to view self-care as a doctor's prescription. If you ignore the doctor's advice, your health may be compromised. That's not far from the truth, because if you neglect to take care of yourself in healthy ways, you'll become frustrated, burned out, irritated, and more likely to cope by using addictive substances.

Self-care can include any safe and healthy activity that you enjoy and that helps to relieve stress. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Get a massage
- Meditate
- Take a nap
- Listen to music
- Exercise or play a sport
- Watch a movie
- Binge-watch a TV series
- Take up a creative hobby
- Get together with supportive friends

Remember that there's a difference between self-care and selfishness. Selfish people take more than they need. Self-care is about filling depleted reserves. Take proper care of yourself and you'll have more energy and motivation to work toward achieving your goals. You'll also be able to take better care of the important people in your life.

5) Don't Bend the Rules

The fifth rule exists as a reminder that any attempt to skirt the four previous rules could threaten your sobriety. When you make one exception, you tend to find excuses to make more and more of them. Eventually, you give yourself permission to tear apart the fragile structure that has kept you on course.

By making the conscious choice to accept responsibility for your addiction and actively work to maintain sobriety, you're empowering yourself to take charge of your future. It's not an easy process, but it's ultimately so rewarding to know that staying committed to your goals can lead to greater joy and fulfillment in your life.

FIVE RULES TO PREVENT ADDICTION RELAPSE

It's Never Too Late to Rebuild Your Life

If you've tried and failed to stay sober after trying to quit, SS Recovery can teach you the skills you'll need to finally break free from addiction. Our programs are customized to support your unique needs, and our experienced staff will guide you on your journey toward starting a new life. To learn more about our programs and how you can prevent relapse, contact us [here](#) or call xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Source:

[1] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4553654/>

