Knowing the Early Warning Signs

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO AVOID A RELAPSE
Knowing Your Early Warning Symptoms

It’s very important for you to know your early warning symptoms of a relapse. If you know what they are, you may be able to take action to stop a relapse.

People say that they sometimes experience certain changes or symptoms when they are starting to relapse. Check all of the symptoms below that you have started to experience. Tell your doctor if you are having any of these symptoms.

☐ I started having trouble sleeping at night.

☐ I couldn’t concentrate or keep my mind on things like I could before.

☐ I forgot things more often than usual.

☐ I couldn’t think as clearly as usual.

☐ My mind started to “race” - ideas started coming faster than usual.

☐ I started to hear voices in my head.

☐ I felt afraid of people, places, or things that I used to feel comfortable with.

☐ People said I was talking or acting strangely.

☐ I started feeling nervous or worried all the time.

☐ I thought people were talking about me or laughing at me.

Watch for early warning signs so you can catch a relapse before it catches you!
What other early warning symptoms have you had? List them in the space below.

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TIP: One way to keep track of your early warning symptoms is to write them on a calendar or in a journal. Also, write down if the symptom has gotten worse since the last time you checked. That way, you can tell your doctor when your symptoms first started bothering you and if they’ve gotten worse over time.
The Dangers of Ignoring Early Warning Symptoms

Sometimes people want to believe that there’s nothing wrong, even when they are starting to see early warning symptoms of relapse. There are many reasons why people do this – here is why some people say they ignore the early warning symptoms:

“I just hoped they would go away.”
“I didn’t want to have to go to the hospital again.”
“I didn’t want to get sick again.”
“I didn’t want my family to know I was getting sick again.”
“I didn’t want to believe it was happening to me again.”

You may have your own reasons for ignoring your early warning symptoms. Instead of ignoring them, you may want to do some things that might stop the relapse.

Which Path Will You Choose?

Ignore the symptoms

• Symptoms don’t go away.
• Symptoms get worse; new ones appear.
• Your symptoms start to control you.
• You have to go to the hospital.

OR

Take action to stop relapse

• You start working toward feeling better sooner.
• You have a better chance to avoid hitting bottom.
• You’ll be less likely to end up in the hospital.
• You can be more in control of yourself and your life.
Five Steps to Managing a Relapse

Stopping a relapse may not be as hard as you think, if you follow these five steps:

1. Know the early warning symptoms you usually get.

2. Watch your symptoms every week. Notice if they get worse or if new ones appear.

3. Recognize that you’re starting to relapse.

4. Call your therapist, doctor, or nurse to let him or her know that you are starting to relapse.

5. Take action to stop the relapse.

To help yourself get comfortable with these five steps, complete the answers to the questions on the next few pages. This information will help you prevent a relapse and tell you what to do if a relapse starts to happen.

**STEP 1. Know your early warning symptoms.**

What early warning symptoms will you be watching for?

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STEP 2. Be aware of your symptoms. Notice if they get worse or if new ones appear. Look for early warning symptoms.

What symptoms usually get worse?

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What kinds of new symptoms usually appear?

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STEP 3. Recognize that you’re starting to relapse. Why is it best not to ignore early warning symptoms?

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STEP 4. Let your therapist, doctor, or nurse know that you are starting to relapse.

Who will you call? ________________________________

Phone Number: ________________________________

What will you say?

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STEP 5. Take action to stop the relapse. Let your doctor, nurse or therapist help you plan what to do to stop the relapse. Write down what you will do if you think a relapse is starting.

I plan to:

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Questions and Answers About Preventing Relapse

You may have a few personal questions about your own risk for relapse. This is the time to ask all of your questions. We’ve provided a few of the questions often asked by clients and the answers:

**Question:** If I stop taking my medicine and I feel a relapse coming on, is it okay to start taking my medicine again?

**Answer:** It depends on the type of medicine you were taking and how long ago you stopped it. Some medicines have to be restarted at a low dose. It’s best to talk to your doctor about starting it again.

**Question:** Sometimes I like to drink a few beers with my friends. I heard you shouldn’t mix medicines and alcohol, so should I stop taking my medicine when I plan to go drinking?

**Answer:** As a general rule, you should always take your medicine. Skipping even one dose can get your brain chemistry out of balance.

It’s best to avoid alcohol, but if you’re really set on drinking with your friends, talk to your doctor about it. Only your doctor can tell you if it’s safe to have a beer with the type of medicine you’re taking.
**Question**: Can exercise cause a relapse?

**Answer**: Exercising is a great idea and can help prevent relapse. But don’t overdo it! If you’re talking about aerobic exercise (such as jogging) or working out with weights, it’s a good idea to have your doctor check you before you begin.

Other types of exercise (such as walking, swimming, or bicycling) are also very helpful. People tend to feel better after doing these kinds of activities. A 20-minute walk is a good way to start!

**Question**: I have so much trouble remembering to take my medicine. Any suggestions?

**Answer**: There are several things you can do. Many people find it helpful to take their medicine at the same time every day. For example, some take their dose right after brushing their teeth or before going to bed. Others like to take it with breakfast.

If you are using a calendar to record your symptoms, you may also want to use the calendar to keep track of the doses you’ve taken. After taking your medicine, put a check mark on that day.

**TIP**: Use a pillbox that holds a week’s worth of medicine. Using a calendar or pillbox will help you remember if you’ve taken your medicine each day. If none of these ideas work for you, you may want to ask a friend or family member to remind you to take your dose each day.
Your Questions About Preventing Relapse

Write down any other questions you have about preventing relapse. Ask your therapist, doctor, or nurse your questions and write their answers below.

Your question:

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Answer:

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Your question:

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Answer:

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This booklet is provided by Community Care Behavioral Health Organization (Community Care) and the Community Care Steps of Hope Program. Part of the UPMC Insurance Services Division, Community Care is a recovery-oriented nonprofit behavioral health managed care organization that manages mental health as well as drug and alcohol services for nearly one million members.