

ABOUT RELAPSE

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Relapse, or a 'slip', within the context of addictive behaviors, can be defined as resuming using an addictive substance after a period of sobriety, or abstinence. According to some, "relapse is the hallmark of addiction"; you only truly know you're addicted to something when you just can't quit on your own, or even after going through a treatment program, one, two, or many times. It's hard to get



sober, and it's hard to stay sober. Most women in recovery will tell you that overall life is much, much better sober, but even after extended periods of sobriety—ten, twenty years or more—the thoughts of using can still rear their ugly heads. Even more dangerous is the idea that maybe one would be able to drink or use like a 'normie', as if time were some magic dust that due to its accumulation miraculously cured the disease of addiction.

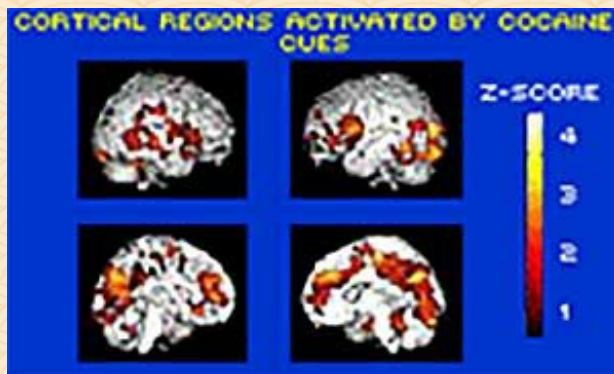
It is not uncommon to experience several relapses in the quest to become sober; in AA, they say, "One day at a time", and truly that is all we have.

Women who are pregnant or postpartum have a unique and difficult set of challenges in maintaining their sobriety which must be acknowledged and

discussed out in the open—shame is one of the greatest killers of addicts and alcoholics, because it makes one turn away from others,

and away from any help that might be out there. The cold, hard facts are that despite common knowledge since late in the 19th century that alcohol is a potent teratogen (an agent that can cause a birth defect in a developing fetus, usually a substance absorbed from the mother's environment), alcohol is still used by between 15% and 20% of all pregnant women.

Specific risk factors for pregnant women's alcohol use include financial difficulties, homelessness, being a single parent with no support from a partner or family, and a history of physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse; studies have shown that between 56% and 92% of alcohol users suffer from concurrent psychiatric issues or illnesses, and up to 70% of the women have experienced childhood sexual abuse in their past; "Many addicted pregnant women affected by current drug policies find themselves in an isolated and resource-poor position—coping with poverty, having a lack of education and social supports, and being involved in violent and unstable intimate relationships."



For more than 50 years researchers have known that certain high-risk situations make maintaining sobriety especially difficult. These situations are common to men and women alike, and do not discriminate against racial or economic lines. Relapse occurs because of this particular underlying effect—the person in recovery being put in and failing to navigate a risky situation, and when negative moods overwhelm a person and they are unable to create or maintain healthy interpersonal relationships which might add clarity to the problems at hand.

It is crucial to recognize the signs that precede a relapse, in yourself if you are in recovery, or in your loved ones and friends.

Some of the pre-relapse telltale signs are:

- Falling back with the 'old crowd' that you used to party or get high with;
- Beginning to deny the gravity of your disease, thinking that you might just be able to control your consumption this time;
- Romanticizing the good feelings and supposed good times you used to have when you were using, and choosing to completely blank out all the horrible results of your use—DUIs, broken relationships, prison time, getting fired, etc.;
- Becoming defensive if someone close to you points out that you are in danger of relapsing, or that they are worried about you—alienating your sober friends, and the positive influences in your life, such as going to AA or NA meetings;
- Becoming depressed, or any other negative changes in attitude or behavior;
- Feeling H.A.L.T.—too hungry, too angry, too lonely or too tired, not as a one-time situation but as a way of life;
- Feeling increasingly stressed out and tense and not having any plans for coping with such feelings except for what you used to do—drink or use over it;
- Loss of belief in your own recovery program;
- Sudden appearance of withdrawal symptoms;
- Feeling increasingly resentful or having unrealistic expectations about what's going on in your life;
- Feeling increasingly bored and not attempting to constructively solve this mood;



- Becoming gripped in fear, and letting the feeling build to intolerable levels;
- Losing yourself in remorse for the past, dwelling upon that which cannot be changed;
- Feeling the desire to self-medicate;
- Telling yourself that common household items don't count—it's okay to drink mouthwash because it's not the vodka you're used to, or switching drugs—from alcoholic to smoking pot in order to 'relax';

The following excerpt, from a blog called XOJane (<http://www.xojane.com/it-happened-to-me/it-happened-me-i-relapsed-mouthwash>), which recounts the author's relapse on Scope, is both funny and heartrending; I highly suggest you read the entire piece, but here's a part:

"After seven months of sobriety, I downed Scope to deal with stress in the office. Never underestimate an addict...

Unfortunately for me, there was a new girl at the office who took an immediate dislike to me. Maybe it was because I was so open about coming back from rehab...Or maybe it was just the fact that I looked fucking awesome. When you stop drinking for a long



period of time, your eyes get brighter, your complexion evens out and you lose the weird beer belly you used to think was just a part of getting older...after seven months of sobriety and feeling good about myself, I started to feel sick on my subway ride to work each day, agonizing about how uncomfortable I knew I was going to feel for the 9-10 hours I spent in my cubicle across from her. One morning, after I had finished working out at the gym before heading to the office, I was gurgling Scope while getting ready for work. As the 30 seconds of having it in the back of my throat went by, I started feeling anxious about the day, wondering what flaw she might try to point out about me or my work that day.

As I was about to spit it out, I swallowed it instead. It was gross. I mean, you'd never eat a toothpaste sandwich, so why would anyone ever drink Scope? The problem with addicts, though, is it's not about the taste or the pain your addiction requires to take effect; it's about the high. Sometimes even the pain is even part of the pleasure.

...Since I hadn't had a drink in seven months, it took only a few minutes before I had a buzz going. I took yet another swig.

'Fuck today!' I thought. 'If she's going to harass me, I'd at least rather be in a state of mind where I don't really give a damn.'

I convinced myself it wasn't a real drink. I mean, what's the alcohol content of mouthwash, really?

Apparently, enough."

Throughout this article we can see the warning signs of a relapse around the corner; unfortunately for the author, she didn't until she had already started coming to work completely drunk, her life spiraled out of control yet again. It's common to hear from those people who have relapsed that using or drinking again, they start right where they left off—the disease has progressed to a certain point, and unfortunately, regardless the length of sobriety, the disease continues to ravage lives as if one had never had any time in sobriety in the first place.

The disease of addiction, and the way of life that is sobriety, is a different path for each person; "relapse is an individual preface, and depending on the personality of the alcoholic/addict, their relapse triggers might be different than others"

<http://www.familyrecoveryolutions.com/articles/relapse/>

In Part 2 of this article, we will examine how postpartum and pregnant women have their own set of difficulties, and what can be done before a relapse or slip occurs to prevent that incident from happening.

For your sake and for the sake of your unborn baby, please don't drink or use illicit drugs during pregnancy. If you are struggling, remember, we at Magnolia Women's Recovery Program care, and are here to help!



If you are having trouble stopping drinking or using drugs, or would like more information, please contact us, your doctor, or use

the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator.

Sources:

<http://www.familyrecoveryolutions.com/articles/relapse/>

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<http://www.addictionsandrecovery.org/relapse-prevention.htm>

Please watch the following YouTube Videos for more information.