



Before the Drink or Drug

Recognizing my relapse pattern before substance use happens

For many people, relapse does not begin with the first drink or drug. Changes often show up earlier in the way we think, feel, behave, connect, and take care of ourselves. The earlier I recognize my pattern, the more opportunity I have to interrupt it before the substance becomes the answer again.

The goal is not to predict relapse. The goal is to recognize when I am beginning to move away from the life and behaviors that protect my recovery.

What Changes First?

Think about what usually begins to change before you are in immediate danger of using.

Body and Routine

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ☐ Sleep changes | ☐ Skipping meals | ☐ Poor hygiene |
| ☐ Low energy | ☐ Restlessness | ☐ Stopping exercise |
| ☐ Ignoring medical needs | ☐ Missing medications | ☐ Other: _____ |

1. Which physical or routine changes usually show up first for me?

Thinking

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ☐ Minimizing | ☐ Romanticizing past use | ☐ Overconfidence |
| ☐ Blaming others | ☐ Entitlement | ☐ Obsessing about relief |
| ☐ 'I am fine' thinking | ☐ 'I deserve this' thinking | ☐ Other: _____ |

2. What thoughts tell me I may be moving away from recovery?

Emotions

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ Irritability | ☐ Loneliness | ☐ Anxiety |
| ☐ Emptiness | ☐ Frustration | ☐ Shame |
| ☐ Boredom | ☐ Restlessness | ☐ Resentment |
| ☐ Hopelessness | ☐ Other: _____ | |

3. Which emotions tend to become hardest for me to tolerate before I use?

What Am I Usually Trying to Get Relief From?

4. What problem, feeling, thought, or situation usually makes escape or relief start to look attractive?



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Recognizing the stages of my pattern

My Warning Signs

Early Warning Signs

I am drifting, but I still have plenty of room to change direction.

- ☐ I stop doing small things that normally support me.
- ☐ I become less honest about how I am doing.
- ☐ I isolate, stop reaching out, or become less connected.
- ☐ I become resentful, restless, irritable, or dissatisfied.

5. What are my own earliest warning signs?

Middle Warning Signs

The pattern is gaining momentum and my choices are narrowing.

- ☐ I begin skipping recovery routines, meetings, therapy, coaching, or other supports.
- ☐ I start keeping things to myself that I would normally talk about.
- ☐ I romanticize using, minimize consequences, or think I can control it now.
- ☐ I move closer to people, places, situations, or behaviors connected to past use.

6. What tells me I have moved beyond drifting and am now in real danger?

High-Risk Warning Signs

Using is beginning to feel reasonable, inevitable, or close.

- ☐ I am planning, bargaining, hiding, testing limits, or creating opportunities to use.
- ☐ I stop caring about consequences that normally matter to me.
- ☐ I avoid people who might challenge what I am doing.
- ☐ I feel like I need immediate relief and I am unwilling to tolerate the discomfort.

7. What are my clearest signs that I need immediate support?



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Interrupting the pattern before it becomes the answer

My Relapse Chain

Relapse patterns are easier to interrupt when I can see the sequence instead of only focusing on the final use.

8. What usually happens first?

9. What do I start thinking or telling myself next?

10. What do I begin doing differently?

11. Who do I stop talking to, or what support do I stop using?

12. What usually happens right before I drink or use?

How I Interrupt the Pattern

When I notice an early warning sign, I will:

☐ Tell someone

☐ Call sponsor/support

☐ Sleep/rest

☐ Use mindfulness

☐ Make a counseling/coaching appointment

☐ Go to a meeting

☐ Eat or hydrate

☐ Exercise/walk

☐ Leave the situation

☐ Other: _____

13. Which actions work best for me before the urge becomes intense?

People I need to contact when I am moving toward danger:

Name / Relationship:

Name / Relationship:

Name / Relationship:

What I Need to Remember

An urge is not a decision. A bad day is not a relapse. A warning sign is information. The earlier I respond, the more choices I still have.

14. What am I most likely to forget when I am moving toward relapse?

15. What do I want the person I am becoming to do when these warning signs appear?

The Principle

Relapse prevention is not only about resisting a drink or drug. It is about recognizing when I am moving away from honesty, connection, responsibility, and the daily behaviors that protect my recovery, then choosing to move back toward them.