

Managing Lapses

The difference between a lapse and a relapse?

A **lapse** is a brief return to old and unhelpful habits. It is very common and normal. Sometimes lapses are triggered by stress, low mood, tiredness, ill health or an event.

A **relapse** is a complete return to old and unhelpful ways of thinking and behaving. People who have a relapse are usually doing the same things as they did before they learned the sort of techniques and strategies we are looking at. A relapse isn't a 'one off event'. It's something which happens over time. Even a relapse isn't 'going back to square one' if you have new learning and strategies to help you manage better.

Stopping a lapse from becoming a relapse

Remember lapses can lead to relapses **but they don't have to!** You can stop a small lapse from becoming a relapse. The more you learn to do this, the better you will feel about yourself and it will help your confidence to carry on not drinking/using.

How?

Often it is what you say to yourself after you have a lapse that can either help you get back on track or lead you to a relapse.

If you see your lapse as a failure, you are likely to just give up and have a relapse.

If you see your lapse as a slip-up, but one you can recover and learn from, then you probably won't have a relapse.

Tips

1. Practice

The best way to prevent a lapse is to keep practicing things we are looking at in the Active Change sessions. If you can't remember some of the things we've looked at, it can help to keep hold of handouts/things you've written so you can easily look at the information to jog your memory. This may be all you need to do to motivate you.

2. Learn from your lapses

Remember that it is normal to occasionally have lapses.

In our daily lives, everyone has times of greater stress, and if you are also coping with a mental health problem, this can make you even more vulnerable to lapse.

The great news is **you can learn a lot from your lapses.**

Try to figure out what the situation was that led to you having a lapse by asking yourself:

- Were you having upsetting or anxious thoughts?
- Was your anxiety/stress level very high?
- Did you do something different?
- Did you know that the situation was going to be difficult or did it take you by surprise?

Knowing why a situation was more difficult for you can help you to prepare for the next time. You can make a plan to help you better cope with difficult situations in the future.

3. It is very important to remember that lapses can happen

Don't beat yourself up or call yourself names like "idiot" or "loser" because this doesn't help. It is much more helpful to realise that we all make mistakes sometimes. Be kind to yourself. We don't speak to other people in such a mean way, so it's helpful not to speak to ourselves in this way.

In fact, it can actually be helpful to have a lapse, because it gives you a chance to learn that lapses are normal and that lapses can be overcome if you get back to practicing your skills.

4. Take the time to reward yourself for your hard work

Give yourself a treat once in a while. A reward might be buying yourself something new, having a walk with a friend or just taking some time to relax, enjoy yourself, or pamper yourself.

5. Be aware of your 'High Risk Situations' and have plans for how you can manage them

A high risk situation is a situation that poses a threat to your sense of control and increases the risk of potential relapse.

