

# Relapse Warning Signs

Read each warning sign. Circle each one that you feel applies to you. Then, underline the sentence in each warning sign that you feel applies to you. Finally, place parentheses around the phrase in this sentence that you feel directly relates to you.

## 1. Apprehension About Well-Being

We experience an initial sense of fear and uncertainty. It is hard to define where it is coming from. There is a lack of confidence in our ability to stay sober. The apprehension may linger or come and go.

## 2. Denial Returns

We reactivate our denial system in order to cope with apprehension and recurrent anxiety and stress. This type of denial is akin to the denial we used in our active addiction to distract people away from our use. We are aware of our denial only in hindsight but seldom recognize it while it is going on.

## 3. Adamant Commitment to Abstinence

First, this appears to be a good sign, not a sign of relapse. But, once we convince ourselves that we will “never use or drink again,” we begin to abandon our program of recovery. We believe we have been “cured” and that we are set free from the desire to ever use or drink again. We equate abstinence with recovery and think that all we have to do to stay sober is stay dry and everything will be all right.

## 4. Repetitive Attempts to Impose Sobriety on Others

We begin to have private judgments on others about their drinking and the quality of the sobriety programs that other recovering people are following. We begin to focus more on what others are doing rather than our own recovery.

## 5. Defensiveness

We notice a change in our attitudes and defensiveness, particularly when questioned about our recovery program.

## 6. Impulsive and Compulsive Behaviors

Our behavior patterns become rigid and repetitive. We begin to control conversations either my monopoly or silence. We often return to overworking or other compulsive behaviors such as shopping, spending, increased smoking, or constantly “being on the run.”

## 7. Tendencies Toward Loneliness and Isolation

These old patterns begin to return. We give excuses why we cannot join others or attend 12-Step Meetings. Our feelings of loneliness are more severe. We usually end up in our usual pattern of staying away from people.

8. Tunnel Vision

We tend to view life in isolated fragments. We focus entirely on one area, preoccupy ourselves with it and avoid looking at other areas. Sometimes, we tend to view only the things going really well, known as the “pink cloud.” Other times we see the world as negative and ourselves as being treated unfairly and believing that we are helpless.

9. Early Depression

Symptoms of depression begin to appear. Listlessness, flat affect and oversleeping begin to develop. Our health and personal appearance may decline, self-pity creeps into our conversations. We may even be labeled by others as lazy, not trying or uncooperative.

10. Decline in Constructive Daily Planning

Our life skills begin to decline. We pay less attention to detail. Our plans begin to fail. Our life is beginning to become unmanageable again without using drugs or alcohol.

11. Idle Daydreaming and Wishful Thinking

We have difficulty concentrating. Our normal thoughts are replaced by fantasy thoughts. Fantasies are generally of escape or being rescued by unrealistic circumstances, such as “winning the lottery.”

12. Confusion, Feelings That Nothing Can Be Solved

We can't seem to figure things out and/or get our priorities in order. A belief that we are a failure begins to surface. The perception that “I have tried my best and it isn't working” is very common.

13. Desire for Happiness

Our conversations with others and our thought patterns become very vague and generalized. We have a desire to be “happy” but do not know how to make this happen.

14. Feeling of Confusion

We have an increasing number of periods where we feel confused. These periods increase in frequency, duration and severity.

15. Increased Irritation in Social Situations

Social interactions with friends, intimate relationships, therapists, and AA members become increasingly strained and argumentative. The arguments increase as your support system begins to confront the progressive increase in old addictive behaviors.

16. More Easily Angered

Anger, frustration, resentments and irritability increase. We begin to over-react to situations.

17. Poor Eating Habits Return

We begin to overeat or undereat. Well-balanced meals begin to be replaced by junk food and structured meals become disrupted.

18. Lethargy Increases

We begin to experience increasing periods of feeling trapped or not having a way out. These periods are often marked by not being able to concentrate, anxiety and a severe feeling of apprehension. We are no longer able to initiate actions.

19. Irregular Sleeping Patterns Return

We begin to have periods of insomnia and nights of restless sleep. Episodes of long sleeping sessions also increase, often lasting from 12-20 hours each.

20. Life Off Balance

Any semblance of a schedule is abandoned. Regular sleeping and eating patterns are abandoned. We have difficulty concentrating and experience severe feelings of anxiety, apprehension and feelings of being trapped. We often feel either rushed or overburdened and then face large blocks of unstructured time and do not know what to do with this time.

21. Deeper Depression

Our depression became more frequent and longer in duration. We began to increase our isolation. When it was necessary to have social contact, we became more irritable and angry. We often felt that no one cared about us.

22. Irregular Attendance at 12-Step Meetings or Other Recovery Related Activities

We begin to make excuses for not attending 12-Step Meetings, aftercare sessions or other support group activities. We revert back to rationalizing and justifying why we cannot go. We discount the value of AA/NA meetings. We find fault in speakers, counselors or others who try to help us.

23. Development of an "I Don't Care" Attitude

We exhibit an attitude that lacks gratitude or attempts at being pleasant. To others, it appears that we do not care. This is to hide the feelings of helplessness and extremely poor self-image we are experiencing.

24. Open Rejection to Help

We shut ourselves down from all sources of help through either anger or discounting others' efforts. Other time, we quietly withdraw to stop others from trying to help.

25. Dissatisfaction With Life

We begin to think that things are so bad that we might as well return to using because things could not get any worse. We feel powerless to change the direction our life is going and soon walk around in a state of fear and self-pity.

26. Feeling Powerlessness and Helplessness Without the Use of Chemicals

Our thought processes become more scattered, our judgment is hazy and our concentration is impaired.

27. Feeling of Self-Pity

We began feeling “Poor Little Old Me” and express this feeling, particularly at AA/NA meetings and with family members.

28. Thoughts of Social Drinking

We begin to think that drinking will solve our emotional problems and we begin to hope that we can drink again in a controlled fashion. We struggle with challenging this thought at times. It soon begins to seem as if we only have a choice of insanity, suicide or return to drinking.

29. Conscious Lying

We begin to see our own lying, denial and rationalizing because it has become so strong. Although we can see this pattern, we cannot stop it.

30. Total Loss of Self-Confidence

We begin to have feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. We feel that we cannot get out of this trap no matter what happens. We are overwhelmed by our inability to think clearly or take action.

31. Building of Resentments

We begin to feel intense anger toward the world in general or toward a scapegoat. We become angry at our inability to function. Sometimes, we turn this anger onto ourselves.

32. Stopping All Treatment

We stop attending 12-Step programs, stop Antabuse or anti-craving medications, stop professional treatments and quit all other forms of treatment related activities. We recognize that this is irrational behavior and that we need help in spite of these actions.

33. Overwhelmed, Lonely, Angry and Frustrated

Because we feel so angry, the option we see is to relapse, commit suicide or go insane. We forget the pain and remember only how good it felt when we were using. We feel complete hopelessness and helplessness. Often, using is an impulsive behavior with little or no conscious preplanning.

34. Return to Active Addiction

This is not a warning sign but a result of our choice to start using again as an answer to the pain of relapse. We plan to use or drink for only a short time, or in a “controlled” fashion but both fail. We start using again because we have neglected to interrupt or stop the warning signs.