

# 11 Steps to Relapse

**1. Change in Attitude** – for some reason you decide that participating in your recovery program is just not as important as it once was. You may begin to return to what some call “stinking thinking” or unhealthy or addictive thinking. Basically, you are not working your program as you did previously. You feel something is wrong, but can’t identify exactly what it is.

**2. Elevated Stress** – An increase in stress in your life can be due to a major change in circumstances or just little things building up. Returning to the “real world” after a stint in residential treatment can present many stressful situations. The danger is if you begin over-reacting to those situations. Be careful if you begin to have mood swings and exaggerated positive or negative feelings.

**3. Reactivation of Denial** – This is not denial that you have a drug or alcohol problem, it’s denial that the stress is getting to you. You try to convince yourself that everything is OK, but it’s not. You may be scared or worried, but you dismiss those feelings and you stop sharing those feelings with others. This is dangerous because this denial is very similar to denial of drug addiction or abuse.

**4. Recurrence of Post-Acute Withdrawal Symptoms** – Anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, and memory loss can continue long after you quit drinking or using drugs. Known as *post-acute withdrawal symptoms*, these symptoms can return during times of stress. They are dangerous because you may be tempted to self-medicate them with alcohol and/or drugs.

**5. Behavior Change** – You may begin to change the daily routine that you developed in early sobriety that helped you replace your compulsive behaviors with healthy alternatives. You might begin to practice avoidance or become defensive in situations that call for an honest evaluation of your behavior. You could begin using poor judgment and causing yourself problems due to impulsive behavior without thinking things through.

**6. Social Breakdown** – You may begin feeling uncomfortable around others and making excuses not to socialize. You stop hanging around sober friends or you withdraw from family members. You stop going to your support group meetings or you cut way back on the number of meetings you attend. You begin to isolate yourself.

**7. Loss of Structure** – You begin to completely abandon the daily routine or schedule that you developed in early sobriety. You may begin sleeping late, or ignoring personal hygiene, or skipping meals. You stop making constructive plans and when the plans you do make don't work out, you overreact. You begin focusing on one small part of life to the exclusion of everything else.

**8. Loss of Judgment** – You begin to have trouble making decisions or you make unhealthy decisions. You may experience difficulty in managing your feelings and emotions. It may be hard to think clearly, and you become confused easily. You may feel overwhelmed for no apparent reason or not being able to relax. You may become annoyed or angry easily.

**9. Loss of Control** – You make irrational choices and are unable to interrupt or alter those choices. You begin to actively cut off people who can help you. You begin to think that you can return to social drinking and recreational drug use and you can control it. You may begin to believe there is no hope. You lose confidence in your ability to manage your life.

**10. Loss of Options** – You begin to limit your options. You stop attending all meetings with counselors and your support groups. You may feel loneliness, frustration, anger, resentment, and tension. You might feel helpless and desperate. You come to believe that there are only three ways out: insanity, suicide, or self-medication with alcohol or drugs.

**11. Relapse** – You attempt controlled, “social” or short-term alcohol or drug use, but you are disappointed at the results and immediately experience shame and guilt. You quickly lose control and your alcohol and drug use spirals further out of control. This causes you increasing problems with relationships, jobs, money, as well as mental and physical health. You need help getting sober again.