

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR LAST RELAPSE AND AVOIDING YOUR NEXT ONE

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Addiction Medicine

- Relapse is a process, a downward spiral series of events that eventually lead to using drugs or problem behaviors again. For example, George's relapse began a month ago when he started to skip AA meetings. Melissa's relapse started weeks before her use when she noticed herself getting more irritable.
- Not everything is lost. Relapses are opportunities to learn about what works to keep you sober and what doesn't. People that relapse do not find themselves back on square one because they gain additional knowledge. Think about recovery as a spiral staircase, it may seem that you are in the same spot, but you are actually one floor higher.
- Cravings are associated with drug use. It turns out that the intense desire to use last only a few minutes...followed by another intense craving maybe a few minutes or a few hours or a few days later. This is great news because the only thing you need to do is not give in to the craving for a few minutes at a time. Keep it simple: sobriety happens one craving at a time!
- For many, the desire to use can be triggered by many different things, the letters HALTS may give you an idea of common feelings and events associated with relapse:

H unger  
A anger  
L oneliness  
T ired  
S tress

1) Please write down things that you know trigger intense desires to use, fill in each category:

a) Places

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b) People

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c) Things you do

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d) Thoughts

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e) Emotions

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f) Physical sensations

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2) How long do your cravings last? For drugs, for problematic behaviors, for food-treat?

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3) What things you've done in the past that helped you delay the use of a drug or a problematic behavior even if for a few minutes, for example, taking a deep breath, praying, jumping jacks or other.

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- 4) In the left column make a list of the reasons that make you want to stop using, in the right column make a list of things you can do in the moment to deal with a craving  
Take this page with you whatever you go. It may save your life!

**Reasons to Stop Using**

**Things that help cravings**

Carry this list with you at all times!! Look at it in times of distress, or when you doubt your skills and resolution to stop using.