

# Slips, Lapses and Relapses: Tips for Challenging Situations



National Eating Disorders Association

Sustained recovery requires careful planning, and a team approach.

For many patients, that means utilizing the full continuum of care. Typically, recovery does not happen once, but takes place over years of mindful application of the lessons learned in treatment. In other words, care goes hand and hand with aftercare.

It can be challenging to re-enter into the environment that one's eating disorder had previously developed. However, going back with a realistic treatment plan can help facilitate the recovery process.

Trust your team. Follow their recommendations for when it is time to step down. It is important to not cut yourself off from support, even when you feel like things are going "fine". Challenges will come up, and while you might have the skills to respond to them without eating disorder behavior it's helpful to have a professional as "backup". They will be able to help you create a plan that includes being aware of what may have triggered you in the past, and help you to work towards creating effective and healthy coping skills.

## Some signs that might indicate relapse:

- Your thoughts keep turning to food, dieting and weight.
- You have been dishonest with your eating disorder treatment professionals or if you feel compelled to hide information or behaviors.
- You worry that you are losing control and may overcompensate with perfectionism.
- You feel as if you have no outlet for your stress.
- You feel hopeless and wonder what you're going to do with your life.
- With diet and exercise, your primary goal is to look good rather than to be healthy.
- You believe that you'll never be happy unless you're thin.
- You see yourself as overweight or obese.
- Friends or family indicate to you that your self-image is inaccurate.
- You look in the mirror frequently and weigh yourself often.
- You skip meals or find ways to purify yourself after eating.
- You get irritable around the issue of food.
- You feel an overwhelming sense of guilt or shame after eating.
- You avoid events that involve food.
- You isolate yourself or engage in increasingly secretive behaviors.
- You hold contempt for people who are overweight or don't eat well according to your standards.

## **Relapse is often a natural part of the recovery process.**

In the event that you feel that you may be in a situation where you have fallen back to eating disorder behavior, there are some things to remember:

1. Seek professional help immediately.
2. Relapse does not mean failure
3. You have been through this before and you can get through it again
4. Be kind to yourself and give yourself time to recover.
5. Refer often to your values and strive to live by them.
6. Work on self-approval, which is not dependent on weight.
7. Accept your personal limitations.
8. Create an environment of respect, optimism, trust and honesty with yourself and others.
9. Know that “failure” neither dooms nor defines you. You are just a person who is willing to take on challenges.
10. Practice, practice, practice!

## **Steps to Help Prevent Relapse:**

1. Seek help from a professional.
2. Develop self acceptance through practicing compassion toward self.
3. Develop a positive and self nurturing internal dialogue.
4. Get treatment for co-occurring disorders such as anxiety and depression.
5. Practice mindfulness and living in the moment.
6. Listen to and honor your feelings.
7. Eat well and listen to your body’s hunger and fullness signs.
8. Accept your genetic makeup and appreciate your body.
9. Have a relapse prevention or correction plan.

## **Additional Resources**

<http://carolinahouse.crchealth.com/avoiding-relapse/>

<http://blogs.psychcentral.com/weightless/2011/08/preventing-managing-an-eating-disorder-relapse/>

<http://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/recovery/self-help-tools-skills-tips/relapse>

<http://www.healthyplace.com/eating-disorders/articles/the-signs-of-an-eating-disorders-relapse/>