IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING TRIGGERS

Just as important as understanding the nature of substance use disorder, is knowing what things can trigger a reoccurrence of symptoms or a relapse. Relapse triggers are a natural part of recovery and planning effective ways to avoid and manage them is the best long-term recovery strategy.

What Are Triggers

Triggers can be social, environmental, and/or emotional situations that can act as a cue to return to substance use. They're highly personal, but some of the most common triggers – many of which can show up on the job:

- Feeling hungry, angry, lonely, or tired -- often referred to by the acronym HALT
- Stress
- Being around the people or going to places where the alcohol or other drug use occurred
- Seeing other people use, like at parties or other social situations
- Social isolation
- Anxiety

Managing Triggers & Preventing Relapse

The best prevention starts with planning, and here are some tips to get started:

- Identify and know your triggers, including people, places and things that could challenge your recovery.
- Use your support system to lean on and to help keep an eye out for warning signs.
- Attend therapy and/or support groups and talk about what you're going through.
- Avoid people and places that make you want to use.

Rebounding After Relapse Triggers

Even with the best-laid plans, risks remain and setbacks can happen. Remember, relapse does not equal failure. Setbacks are common for those with chronic diseases -- and addiction is no exception. Relapse just means treatment needs to be adjusted and that includes identifying the trigger and learning what steps to take to prevent it in the future.

Healthy Coping Strategies

Learning healthy coping strategies can help you deal more effectively with your triggers:

- Maintaining a good support system – Family, friends, sponsors, and those in your recovery circle you can call on if you encounter a trigger. And today's technology makes it easy with texting and video calls that allow you immediate access to needed support.

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- Distracting yourself – Use your gadgets (i.e., cell phones, laptops) to divert attention away from triggers and instead switch your focus to a video, game, or social media. If you're out in public or with friends or family, don't worry about appearing to be rude. There's nothing rude about taking care of yourself and avoiding triggers.

- Practice relaxation – Recognize when things are getting stressful and use relaxation techniques, like deep breathing and positive self-talk, to stay calm and level-headed. Learning healthy ways to approach stressful situations will not only help you prevent triggers, but they can also reduce your stress and improve your overall physical and mental health.

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