

If you are reading this you are not likely having success staying clean and sober. The following outlines top reasons for relapse.

< NOTE! Self-knowledge helps identify the problem but nothing changes until I change. I have to become TEACHABLE and put aside everything I think I know about how to recover. I need to learn a new way of living: I must **work** a program for thriving without relying on substances to cope. No one can do this for me and it can't just be purchased. For me, recovery came without relapse once I stopped thinking I knew better than those trying to help me. I surrendered, got out of my head, and did the suggested actions to get to the other side of this disease. I now live a life free of the bondage of self. Alcoholism and drug dependency are now part of my story but are not my reality today.>

If you are not familiar with reasons why you relapse, here is a recap of the main and interconnected ones.

1. Physical and Psychological Dependence

- **Brain Changes:** If I am a chronic alcohol and/or drug abuser, my brain chemistry alters. Brain function such as controlling reward, stress, and self-control are damaged or destroyed permanently. These changes can lead to intense cravings, even after prolonged abstinence. ([Link to Enzyme Newsletter](#))
- **Withdrawal Symptoms:** The discomfort of withdrawal symptoms—such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, or physical pain—can drive me back to drinking to alleviate these feelings. ([Link to Detox Guidance](#))

2. Triggers

- **Hanging around where I used to drink or use:** Being around places, people, or situations associated with drinking or using can prompt strong cravings.
- **Stress:** Stressful events or chronic stress often lead me to use alcohol drugs as a coping mechanism, even after periods of sobriety.
- **Emotional Triggers:** Negative emotions like sadness, guilt, or frustration, as well as positive emotions like celebration, can trigger a desire to drink or use. After years of turning to a substance to deal with emotions I need to learn a new program to successfully deal with life when it gets “lifey”.

3. Lack of Coping Skills

I need to learn new, healthier ways to handle life's challenges. If coping mechanisms aren't well-developed, I will return to alcohol during difficult times.

4. Social Pressure and Isolation

- **Hanging out with others who are drinking and/or using :** In early recovery, when I am surrounded by friends or family who drink or use, I find it difficult to not join in.
- **Loneliness:** If I choose to isolate or don't get support, I am more likely to relapse. I seek comfort in alcohol or drugs as I have not learned any other way to fill the void.

5. Overconfidence in Recovery

After a period of sobriety, I may believe that I am better, that I have “beaten” the addiction and can drink or use moderately. This “experiment” always ends up with relapse if you are truly alcoholic or an addict.

6. Mental Health Challenges

- Co-occurring mental health issues like anxiety, depression, PTSD, or bipolar disorder can exacerbate the risk of relapse if not adequately treated. Remember alcohol IS a depressant.
- Alcohol is often used as self-medication, creating a vicious cycle of addiction and relapse

7. Biological Factors

- **Genetics:** Some individuals may have a genetic predisposition to addiction, making them more vulnerable to relapse.
- **Substance Tolerance:** Over time, the body adapts to alcohol and/or drugs. I became “immune” to my drug of choice, needed dangerously increased amounts and never found the same initial release.

8. Inadequate Support or Treatment

Relapse is more likely when I lack access to effective treatment or support systems. For me, a 12 step program that I actively work with a sponsor who has also recovered this way has been critical. (Link - What is a sponsor) This may be combined with therapy, rehabilitation programs, or sober communities. I enjoy 24-hour support with 12 step program zoom groups and hotlines (LINK RESOURCES) I CANNOT DO THIS ALONE!

9. Shame and Guilt

Relapses often come with feelings of failure, which can lead to a sense of hopelessness, further fueling the cycle of drinking. I can restart my program immediately or choose to stay in this feeling of self-pity. There are solutions if I do the work.

Breaking the Cycle - Get out of my own way!

Recovery is a process, and relapse doesn't mean failure—it's often a step on the journey to long-term sobriety. For me it started like this:

- I have to be totally, thoroughly, painstakingly **honest with myself** about where I am at. I must then **share honestly with my doctor** about what I am consuming, how much etc.. If my condition is advanced I may require medical detox.
- I need to **commit to a program** addressing alcohol and drug abuse. Rehabilitations works for many however even in rehab 12 Step programs are recommended for continuing recovery. Why not start now?
- I need to build a **strong support system**. For me this starts with an appropriate 12 Step Group (eg. Alcoholics Anonymous for alcoholism; Narcotics Anonymous for drug abuse, etc.)
- Learning **new coping mechanisms** for stress and triggers.

(HOMEWORK: write down in your Recovery Journal your experience with the reasons for relapsing listed above - add your own reasons if not on this list.)

The great news is you can recover without further relapse if you do the work suggested elsewhere in MEND.

First and foremost I needed to get out of my own way. My own “best thinking” got me to the point that my life depended on doing the work found in this website and its links.. I discovered I can't do this alone or my way, picking and choosing the parts of the program that were of my choosing. When I finally got honest, surrendered that I did not know best, I began to learn and live my recovery program. Today I live my best life and you can too.

Ask yourself: Am I willing to get out of my own way?