

# High-Risk Situations

## What are high-risk situations?

High-risk situations include the following:

1. Any person, place, or situation connected with using drugs or alcohol
2. Any place or situation that exposes you to the presence of alcohol or drugs
3. Any place or situation that is associated with high stress

## Why is it important to identify high-risk situations?

In the past, relapse was thought of as a failure to abstain, while sobriety was equated with success. There was no middle ground. But now we know that relapse is a process that happens in your brain before you ever drink or use. Certain triggers, emotions, or situations may compel you to think about drinking or using to cope.

As soon as you get in your car and start to drive to a bar, your brain begins making dopamine. You've begun the process of relapse before the alcohol touches your lips. Your body and brain chemistry is such that it's not possible for you to even think of alcohol or drugs without starting the dopamine snowball effect that could lead you to drink not one, but five, ten, or twenty drinks. Your brain doesn't know the difference between you actually taking a drink or you imagining taking a drink. It reacts the same way; it wants more. That's why you are powerless over your addiction.

It's likely that in early recovery you still lack the ability to identify and avoid high-risk situations, you lack a lifestyle that supports abstinence, and you have very little experience at staying sober.

You can learn to prevent a relapse and a return to use by identifying your triggers and by acknowledging and addressing your feelings. And even if you do relapse, there are many methods you can use to cope and get back on track as quickly as possible.

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### How can you identify your high-risk situations?

In early recovery, you'll need to identify your high-risk situations and develop an emergency plan to cope with these situations and with the process of relapse itself.

The main high-risk situations that can make alcoholics and addicts more vulnerable to relapse are

- negative feelings
- cravings to use
- pleasant emotions (feeling good)
- physical pain or illness
- tests of personal control over substances
- social pressure to drink alcohol or use other drugs
- having fun with others (for example, at parties or other social events)
- conflict with others

#### Recovery Action Step

Make a relapse prevention plan for yourself by answering these questions:

1. What are some of the high-risk situations you know you will encounter?
2. How will you manage these situations?
3. List people who can help you identify and prepare for high-risk situations.

Discuss your answers with your sponsor and recovery support group. They will help you create a plan to deal with these situations and negative emotions.

### How can you handle high-risk situations?

Many people in early recovery relapse when they put themselves in a high-risk situation without realizing or preparing for it. That's why it's so important to identify dangerous situations.

If you're not sure if a situation is high-risk, talk to your sponsor or others in recovery for guidance. If you can't avoid a high-risk situation, give yourself permission to leave if it becomes threatening or uncomfortable. You don't need to test yourself in the presence of drugs or alcohol. You've taken that test before.

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You may have escaped without relapse before, but in the end the risk is never worth the potential outcome. Sometimes an event or situation that seems safe can turn out to be dangerous. Before you attend any event or get into an unknown situation, give yourself permission to leave when you need to.

Make sure you have reliable transportation or a method to leave right away, if that's what you need to do. You may not have driving privileges as a consequence of your chemical use. But you can still avoid being trapped at an event by talking to your sponsor beforehand or making sure a friend can pick you up.