

## What is Relapse?

Relapse is the term used to describe an increase in unhelpful thinking and behaviours after a period of feeling improved or after experiencing better mental health

This tool kit is designed to assist you in developing your own relapse prevention plan. It will help to reinforce the things that you do to maintain your emotional and physical wellbeing.

Over a period of time, hopefully you will have seen some improvement in the way you feel with regard to your symptoms and you are now feeling more in control of your thoughts and / or behaviours. In order to get to this point, you must have changed a part of the way that you think or behave, whether you realise it or not.

This toolkit will help you to identify what you have done that has made a difference to the way you feel and what you can do to maintain that change.

## What is Relapse Prevention?

Prior to a relapse, people will often experience changes in their feelings, thoughts & behaviours that indicate an increase in illness symptoms and decline in mental health. These changes are referred to as early warning signs.

Relapse prevention is the term used to describe a way of identifying triggers, early warning signs and developing appropriate response plans. Identifying early warning signs as quickly as possible means an individual can take positive action and seek help early to minimise or possibly prevent the impact of a relapse on their quality of life.

Relapse prevention is an essential part of the recovery process. Relapse prevention is about maximising wellness for people with mental illness by reducing the likelihood and impact of relapse.

## What are Relapse Warning Signs?

Warning signs are changes in symptoms or in some aspect of behaviour, thoughts or feelings. These usually indicate that a relapse may happen. The key to preventing relapse is to be able to identify your warning signs as early as possible. By doing so you might then be able to avert the relapse altogether or, at least reduce its impact and its severity on your health.

Some of the more common early warning signs of relapse are:

- Feeling depressed or unhappy
- Feeling tense or restless
- Feeling anxious or worried
- Feeling unsafe or threatened
- Feeling paranoid - thinking that people are talking about you
- Feeling irritated, quick tempered or aggressive



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It is also important to have a plan of what to do should you experience a reoccurrence of any of the signs you have listed in the previous page.

Remember, that these warning signs are a helpful signal to indicate that you are stressed about a situation or event, and it may or may not mean that you are becoming unwell again. These signs are useful for you to recognise that it is a good time to take action to reduce the stress and reduce the likelihood of you experiencing a relapse.

## Asking for Help

Sometimes other people, besides yourself need to be involved in your care. The reason for this is purely to help in times of 'unwellness'. By having a dedicated helper, you can avoid a relapse as you often don't realise yourself that you are becoming unwell. Remember, the earlier your warning signs are detected, the greater the likelihood that you can prevent a relapse, or reduce its severity.

### Things to consider when choosing others for help and assistance are:

- Someone who is supportive, interested and trusted
- Knowledgeable about your illness
- Aware of your warning signs in the past
- Helpful when you have been ill before
- Sees you frequently e.g. once a week
- Willing to help you in this way

### This helper may assist you in various ways:

- Help you identify and monitor your warning signs
- Agree to tell you if they think you are becoming unwell

## Who would you ask to help you?



Please write down these people / services here:



## Preventing a Relapse

It is important to use periods of wellness as an opportunity to actively prevent relapse. You need to monitor or pay attention to how you are feeling, so that you can catch early warnings of a possible relapse.

In preventing a relapse there are a number of strategies you may find helpful in dealing with the warning signs or the symptoms of relapse.

## Making a plan

Preventing a relapse requires you to develop a plan that is tailored to maintaining new behaviours and thoughts. The plan could involve integrating positive behaviours into your daily routine. These activities could include diversion activities, various coping skills and emotional support.

Coping skills often involve asking for help from an experienced peer/family member or using relaxation skills to help reduce the strength of anxiety. Look for alternative activities and work on recognising your warning signs. Finding different ways of dealing with emotional states and rehearsing new responses will help you to achieve more positive results from those events that you would have previously had difficulty managing.

***Refer to page 7 for your Relapse Prevention Plan template to complete.***

## Relapse Prevention: Things to consider

### Talking about how you feel

Talking with a friend, family member or trusted person about how you feel can often leave you feeling calmer and more comfortable. If you feel you need professional help and support, you can access therapy services

### Relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques have been found to be very useful; these can include refocusing techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises (where you breathe from the diaphragm and not the chest) and progressive muscle relaxation which involves focusing on each muscle group, one at a time, and then tensing and relaxing the muscles.

### Active problem solving

This involves looking at what the problem is, thinking of all possible solutions, identifying what the consequences of each are and then choosing what the best solution would be.

### Diary writing

Writing a diary can be very helpful for some individuals. Writing down what you are experiencing can be an effective way of gaining a new perspective on the problem and making it easier to deal with.

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## **Cognitive restructuring**

Cognitive restructuring is a process that involves using positive affirmations such as “I am worthwhile” to replace the often irrational and inaccurate beliefs of “I am worthless”. This can also be linked to challenging negative thoughts and using guided imagery, (which can involve imagining yourself being in a different place or handling a situation in a different or more appropriate way).

## **Rewarding yourself**

When you have avoided negative behaviours or used new coping skills - reward yourself. What you do does not matter as long as it is something which you enjoy. This can be something as simple as a trip to the cinema or reading your favourite book.

## **Diet**

Paying attention to your diet can help you to improve your overall mood and may also help to reduce mood swings. A high sugar diet can often cause or exacerbate anxiety. Try to eat well balanced meals at set times so that you are providing your body with the correct nutrition at the right times.

Additionally, by having your meals at set times, you are establishing a schedule for your body to work to. Stimulants such as caffeine, sugar etc can often exacerbate anxiety and can lead to the development of physical feelings of anxiety such as a racing heart rate etc.

Maintaining a healthy, balanced diet can also provide you with the added strength you need to successfully deal with stressful situations. Focussing on your diet will also help you to cope with any secondary stress symptoms which can include; loss of sleep, lack of appetite. It may also help eliminate problems such as sexual difficulties and breathing irregularities.

## **Exercise**

When we get anxious, adrenaline rushes through our bodies to prepare us to either flight or fight the feared object/situation. This causes the physical effects of anxiety such as feeling shaky, lightheaded etc. By undertaking regular activities such as walking, going to the gym, running, swimming etc you can burn off the adrenaline which will reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety.

## **Handling day to day problems / feelings as they happen**

Handle any feelings and problems when they occur. This way pressure and stress (which can lead to anxiety) will not build up. The stress you are already feeling will only become worse if you put off dealing with any problems. Distraction / refocusing techniques One of the most powerful coping skills a person can have is an ability to refocus their attention. This is because when you are feeling anxious your whole attention is focused on anxious thoughts.

Focusing your attention away from your anxious thoughts will distract you. An exercise you can do in order to refocus your attention can be something as simple as completing a word or number puzzle or even just counting objects that are in the room. Sometimes people may need to do activities that require a bit more concentration (for example, some people find exercises such as counting backwards from 100 in groups of three is useful) as it is often the case that the more mentally challenging an activity is, the quicker you will be able to reduce your anxiety.

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## Positive thinking / self-talk

This includes putting together positive. Make sure they are personal with the use of 'I', 'Me' and 'My'. Ensure they are believable and realistic. Try to make them short and easy to remember. The more often you repeat these affirmations the more likely positive thinking will become your routine way of thinking. Try listing the positive thoughts and behaviours that prevent you from feeling anxious and practice implementing these every day. Now you have identified and practiced the positive behaviours and thoughts you already experience on a regular basis, ensure you maintain these as they are often great for boosting your confidence and they help banish anxiety!



## My Relapse Prevention Plan

<b>1. My Diagnosis is:</b>
<b>2. Three symptoms (warning signs) I experience with my illness are:</b>
<b>a.</b>
<b>b.</b>
<b>c.</b>
<b>3. Stressful events that endangered my mental health and put me in crisis:</b>
<b>4. What can I do to avoid stressful events in the future:</b>

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<b>5. Current stressors in my life are:</b>
<b>6. Three ways that I can do to reduce my stress are:</b>
a.
b.
c.
<b>7. Three of my positive qualities are:</b>
a.
b.
c.
<b>8. Supportive friends/family member that I call on a regular basis:</b>
<b>Person 1 - Name:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>
<b>Person 2 - Name:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>
<b>Person 3 - Name:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>
<b>Person 4 - Name:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>
<b>9. Services or organisations that can help me when I feel I am stressed</b>
<b>Name:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>

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<b>Name:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>
<b>Name:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>
<b>Name:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>
<b>10. A daily community/leisure/healing activity I will engage in is:</b>
<b>11. An activity I will definitely avoid is:</b> <i>(consider reducing /ceasing alcohol and other drugs)</i>
<b>12. Three steps I will take to prevent relapse:</b>
<b>a.</b>
<b>b.</b>
<b>c.</b>
<b>13. If I begin to relapse (when symptoms/warning signs return or get worse) I will:</b>



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**My backup (emergency) plan is:**



## Emergency Plan / Crisis Plan


**Your General Practitioner's name is:**

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	<p><b>Emergency numbers</b></p> <p><b>Lifeline:</b> 13 11 14</p> <p><b>Mens Line:</b> 1300 78 99 78</p> <p><b>Directline (Drug &amp; Alcohol):</b> 1800 888 236</p> <p><b>GP After Hours support line:</b> 1800 022 222</p> <p><b>OCD &amp; anxiety help line:</b> 1300 269 438</p> <p><b>Domestic Violence line:</b> 1800 737 732</p> <p><b>Youth blue:</b> 1300 224 636</p> <p><b>Gambling helpline:</b> 1800 858 858</p> <p><b>Suicide line:</b> 1300 651 251</p> <p><b>Suicide call back service:</b> 1300 659 467</p>
	<p><b>eMental Health website links:</b></p> <p>Suicide call back service</p> <p>myCompass</p> <p>Gather My Crew</p>

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	MindSpot Moodgym Sane Mental Health Online Beyondblue Reachout Biteback
	<b>eMental Health smart phone apps:</b> This Way Up Smiling Minds 1Giant Mind PTSD coach Brave