

Relapse Prevention Handbook 2020

Created by GDAS
Treatment Workers



GWENT DRUG AND
ALCOHOL SERVICE

Relapse Prevention Handbook

01 - The Effects of Alcohol

02 - Deciding to Change

03 - Harm Reduction

04 - Managing Urges & Cravings

05 - High Risk Situations

06 - Develop a positive support network

07 - Building my coping skills

08 - Practice good self-care

09 - Additional Resources



**GWENT DRUG AND
ALCOHOL SERVICE**

The effects of Alcohol

Alcohol can make us feel good. A couple of drinks can help us to relax, put us in a good mood, feel more energetic & confident, it can help us to forget about our worries and stresses and feel happier. But alcohol is a depressant drug so these benefits are only temporary if we keep drinking.

What are the downsides?

- Health risks
- Effect sleep patterns
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Dehydration
- Lower your fight and flight function
- Alcohol overdose
- Impact on social life and relationships
- Guilt
- Increase anxiety and depression
- Low mood
- Increase aggressive tendencies
- Increase suicidal thoughts
- Increase other drug taking

What happens when someone is dependent on alcohol?

Alcohol dependence, is the most serious form of drinking problem and describes a strong, often uncontrollable, desire to drink. Drinking plays an important part in the day to day life of alcohol dependent people, which could lead to building up a physical tolerance or experiencing withdrawal symptoms if they stop. Someone could also be becoming dependent on alcohol if they find it very difficult to enjoy yourself or relax without having a drink, you could have become psychologically dependent on alcohol.

Physical symptoms of withdrawal

Hand tremors
Shakes
Sweating
Nausea
Seizures
Visual hallucinations
Death

Psychological symptoms of withdrawal

Depression
Anxiety
Irritability
Insomnia
Restlessness
Paranoia

Other effects of alcohol

Slurred speech
Headaches
Confusion
Drowsiness
Vomiting
Diarrhoea
General feeling of unwell

Physical and Mental Health

- High blood pressure, heart problems, risk of stroke
- Cancers of the stomach, breast, throat, mouth
- Liver disease, liver cancer
- Infertility, erectile dysfunction
- Memory loss
- Depression, anxiety, suicidal thinking
- Weight gain, malnutrition
- Digestive issues
- Organ damage

Drink Driving

- 0.35 - over the limit
- If you are caught driving under the influence the consequences are serious, you could:
- Be imprisoned
- Be banned from driving
- Issued an unlimited fine
- Cause harm and even death to innocent individuals
- Lose employment, family and friends

Alcohol affects every part of ourselves as individuals and our lives.

When someone develops a problem with alcohol it becomes their priority above all else. This could be to the detriment of their mental or physical health, their job, their families and the enjoyment they find in life normally.

Alcohol and our appearance

- Face can look bloated and puffy
- Stomach appear bloated
- Dehydrates your skin – increase wrinkles
- Increases acne prone skin
- Bloodshot eyes
- The body attempts to empty the alcohol out of your body through the process of sweating, urine and through your breath
- Increases weight gain

Alcohol and sleep

- Although we may fall asleep faster, it disrupts the amount of time you have in REM sleep, REM sleep benefits your body by improving mood, memories and learning. Not getting enough REM sleep may cause detrimental effects to your physical and emotional health.
- Reduces individuals coping strategies to help deal with threatening situations
- Increases visits to the bathroom and snoring

Alcohol Overdose

We used to call it alcohol poisoning but drinking too much alcohol can cause overdose just like taking too much of other drugs.

Alcohol is a depressant that affects your central nervous system, it slows down your speech, movement and reaction time. An overdose occurs when you consume too much alcohol and your body is unable to break it down safely.

The body will try to warn us that we're drinking too much; we'll have trouble with our coordination, we'll vomit, we'll have blackouts and then eventually we'll lose consciousness. Overdose can lead to seizures, cardiac arrest and death.



Common Risk Factors

- Age
- Gender – men are at a higher risk
- Body size – weight, height determines how fast alcohol is absorbed in your body
- Tolerance – having a high tolerance or drinking too quickly
- Binge drinking – consuming more than 5 drinks within an hour
- Drug use – mixing alcohol and drugs can cause serious complications
- Health conditions – such as diabetes can put you at an increased risk of overdose



Signs of overdose

- Individual cannot be aroused (awaken)
- Mental confusion
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Slow breathing – fewer than 8 breaths per minute
- Hypothermia – low body temperature – bluish and paleness in skin colour

Alcohol and Pregnancy



We still aren't totally sure what is safe for a woman to drink during pregnancy. That is why the guidance from the Chief Medical Officer is that women shouldn't drink at all if they are pregnant or trying to get pregnant. Here is some information about what we do know.

Pregnancy

- Drinking alcohol at any stage during pregnancy can cause detrimental effects to your unborn baby
- During the first trimester of a females pregnancy the likelihood of miscarriage high. By consuming alcohol this also increases the likelihood of miscarrying.
- When alcohol is consumed it is passed into the bloodstream and passed through the baby's placenta and directly into their blood stream, how they are affected is dependent on how much alcohol is consumed
- Drinking alcohol throughout pregnancy can increase the risk of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)

What is Foetal Alcohol Syndrome?

- Consuming alcohol throughout pregnancy can affect the babies' brain development. It can increase the chance of neurological damage, abnormal growth and can cause abnormal facial characteristics to the babies face due to the foetus being exposed to alcohol.
- The characteristics can be: small and narrow eyes, a small head and a smooth area between the nose and upper lip
- FAS can increase the chances of: miscarriages, still birth, premature births and low birth weight
- Not all individuals diagnosed with FAS can have facial deformities, they may develop; learning difficulties, lack of social interaction skills, poor attention, coordination and lack of social awareness skills.
- With help and support these children can lead full lives but getting a diagnosis is key.

Advice for mums to be

- As drinking can cause long term effects on your unborn child the best advice is not to consume alcohol
- The same advice applies if you are trying to conceive. For women alcohol can reduce their chances of conception and for men it can reduce testosterone levels and sperm quality.
- If you were unaware you were pregnant and have been drinking, don't panic but talk to your GP straight away about your concerns
- If you are physically dependent on alcohol don't just stop drinking as this could be dangerous. Get support from your GP or GDAS to help you stay safe.



1.3

million children are affected by alcohol

It increases a child's risk of developing social and emotional problems impacting on their well-being

7,551

deaths per year in the UK are due to alcohol

Rates of alcohol related deaths are higher in males than females

360,000

domestic violence incidents are alcohol related

Marriages are also twice as likely to end in divorce when there are alcohol problems

50%

of child protection cases identified alcohol as a factor

This could be direct physical abuse but is often due to neglect of the child's basic needs

The effect on others

Alcohol doesn't just affect us. Other people can be put at risk by our drinking, particularly if we have children. It makes it much harder to care for others when we have a problem with alcohol.

- Increase in anxiety – due to not knowing how parent is going to react
- Increased emotions of anger, frustration, sadness – may increase challenging behaviour
- Children may develop feelings of not being wanted and feeling unloved due to not receive sufficient affection from parental figures
- Children may carry emotional burden of not feeling loved, wanted or they are too blame
- Children may take on too many responsibilities at a young age in which they don't enjoy their childhood



- Children may learn various behaviour from parents and perceive this as acceptable ways of behaving – violence, aggression, shouting, swearing
- Impact on schooling – arriving late, not going to school as parents are too ill to take them, or worrying about parents at school therefore affecting concentration
- Conflict relationships might be created between parents
- Parents can also spend a lot of time away from their children

How can my alcohol use cause harm to my child?

- Not providing appropriate care – lack of safety precautions, poor hygiene, unsupervised for long periods of time, or left in care of older sibling
- Mood swings are increased when individuals are under the influence of alcohol – less emotion and affection provided to your child, aggressive tendencies may show

What about other family members?

- Can cause conflict in relationships
- Broken or lost relationships
- Lose a support network
- Impact on their well-being and health, due to them being concerned about you and your use – increases anxiety and depression
- Impact on your children not spending time with family members and them losing a support network
- Family members may experience your emotional and aggressive outbursts

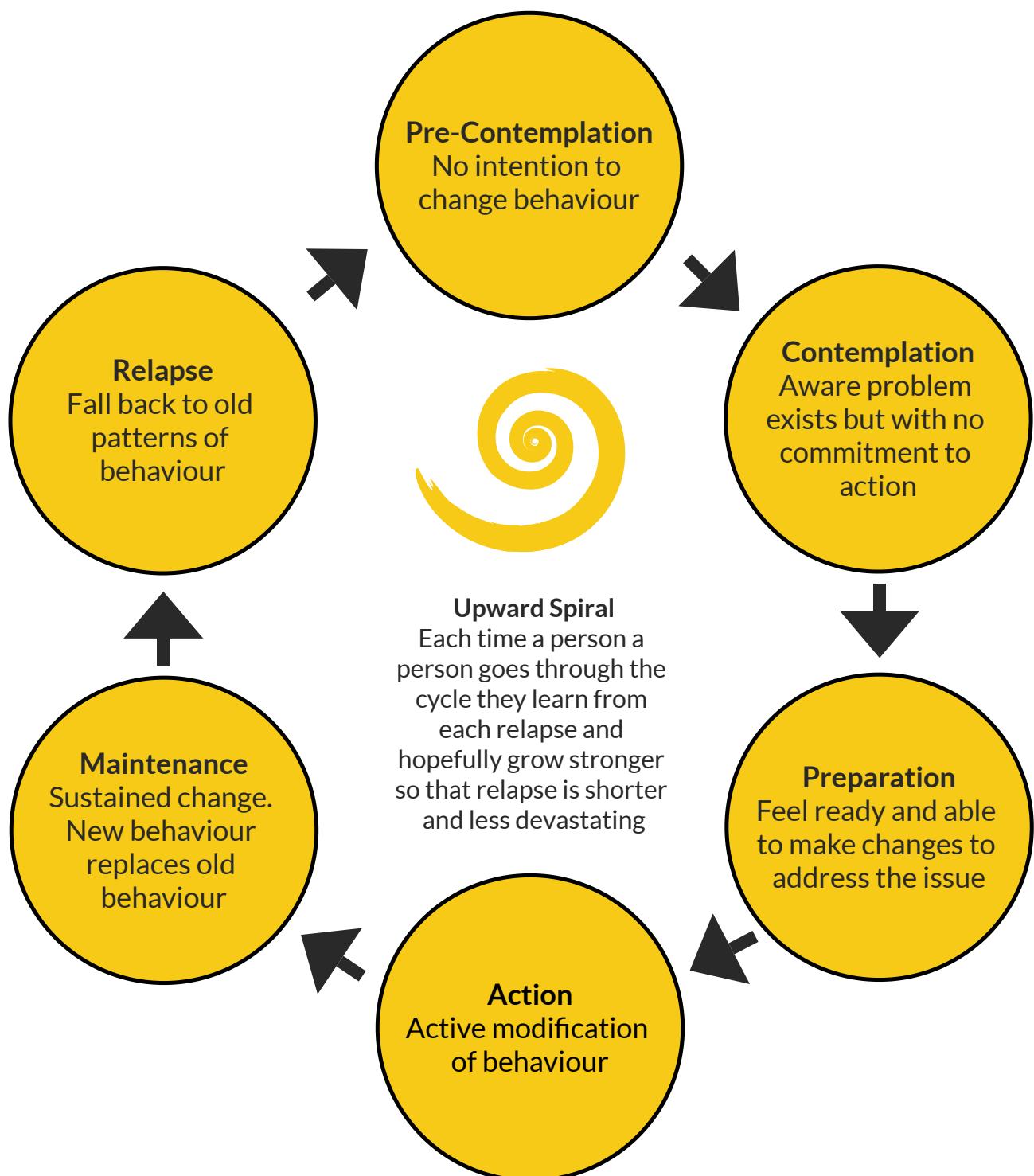
The Cycle of Change

What motivates us to make changes?

We know that changing alcohol use is not as easy as it sounds. Often it's the thought of changing that is scarier than doing it.

The Cycle of Change is a diagram commonly used to show people the process of change. This can help people start thinking about it. Not all people will follow the stages in the Cycle of Change and people may go around several times.

Every time someone goes round they will be learning more about what works for them and what they need to look out for.



How my life is now

Consider your drinking, health, relationships, hobbies, employment etc. There might be good and bad things

Deciding to make a change

It's a big step to decide to change your drinking. It's important to consider why you're doing it and how you want things to be different. Setting a clear goal can help us visualise the future.

How I would like my life to be

Try to be specific - how much would you like to be drinking, if at all? What else would you like to be different? The clearer the goal, the easier to know we've achieved it

What are the benefits of changing?

Remembering why we're making changes can help in tough times, what are your reasons? This could be better relationships, better health, feeling better emotionally or just having more money in your pocket.



Relapse Prevention

Definitions

Lapse - A normal and changeable temporary blip in recovery that typically does not take away from someone's motivation to stay sober and recover.

Relapse - A full slip back into problematic substance use.

Relapse Prevention - a primarily cognitive behavioral approach to relapse with the goal of identifying and preventing high-risk situations

It's understandable I had a setback because...

What I have learnt is...

With hindsight what I would do differently is...

Therefore what I will do from now on is...

Othertimes I will be more vulnerable and need to take care...

Harm Reduction

Thiamine



Alcohol can cause brain damage. This can be due to deficiencies in Thiamine which is a form of B1 Vitamin to help protect your brain. We normally get B1 through our diets but people tend to have poorer diets when they are drinking more. Taking Thiamine means our brains can stay better protected from the effects of alcohol

Reduction Planning



If you are physically dependent a slow, gradual reduction is the safest way to make changes. Work on a 10% reduction per week. So if you drink 10 cans, only drink 9 and see how you feel before reducing more

Tips for reducing



Use drinks cups to help you measure how much to drink
Taller glasses

Add in mixers, for example fizzy drinks or juices

Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks

Don't keep the bottle next to you, we drink more slowly when we keep having to get up to refill

Buy smaller amounts of alcohol or lower percentage alcohol. For example switching from spirits to cider or from a high strength to a lower strength lager

Urges & Cravings

- Are a normal part of recovering from an addiction – If you can manage the craving you will re-train your brain and cravings will fade eventually.
- Are physical and emotional sensations that tempt you to drink even if you do not want to. These can be triggered by external (environment) or internal (positive or negative thoughts and emotions) factors.
- Can be uncomfortable but may last no more than 20 minutes – the more you manage a craving, the easier it gets over time.
- Giving in to cravings prolongs their presence in your life – not giving in to cravings and thinking about consequences from using helps speed up recovery.
- When a craving happens – keep your reasons for stopping close and read them over again.

Ways to manage cravings

- Finding new ways to relax
- Motivational statements
- Walking or Jogging
- Reading
- Relaxation techniques
- Breathing exercises
- Talking to someone who will listen and help
- Your favourite songs on a playlist
- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Swimming
- Sitting in nature/garden
- Finding an interesting hobby
- Some good food
- Leaving the situation if it is an external trigger
- Challenging thinking
- Surfing the urge - ride it out
- Keep a craving diary (see next page)

How can you manage your cravings?

Everyone is different and it is important that ways to manage cravings work for you. Write down some ways that you can try to manage cravings when they occur.



Cravings Diary

Sometimes it can be difficult to identify what might trigger a craving. Keeping a cravings diary can help to understand them and develop plans to deal with them.

| Date/Time | Situation (People, place, weather) | What was I thinking & feeling when the craving began? | Rate the strength out of 10 | How I responded (Feelings, Actions) | What I'll do next time |
|-----------|---|---|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| | | | | | |
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High Risk Situations

Any situation or event that poses a threat to your recovery is considered a high-risk situation. High-risk situations can be related to your emotional state or it can be a consequence of your external surroundings.

Examples of High Risk Situations:

- **Places** – local Pub, Clubs or parties.
- **Particular people** – people you drink heavily with; or people who make you feel stressed.
- **Emotions** – Boredom, fear, anger, happiness, depression or loneliness.
- **Particular stresses** – relationship difficulties, job stress, recurrent traumatic memories
- **Physical feelings** – tiredness, hunger, pain, thirst.
- **Habit** – particular routines or times when you used to drink (weekends).
- **Availability** - where alcohol is immediately to hand, or is free.
- **Social Pressure** – people topping up your glass, buying round, pressing you to drink.
- **HALT** - being hungry, angry, lonely or tired

What are your High Risk Situations?

Give some examples below about what your High Risk Situations might be.

| What is the situation? For example, where does it take place, who would be there, how would you be feeling? | Rate the risk score out of 10. A score of 10 means this is the highest risk you can think of where drinking feels inevitable. |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |

Planning for High Risk Situations

Avoiding high risk situations can be a helpful strategy, particularly in early recovery.

It's not always possible though to avoid high risk situations in recovery, but planning ahead can help prevent relapse.

The more prepared we are to deal with situations that we find difficult, the more likely we are to get through them without drinking

Things to consider when creating a plan

- Remind yourself of your goal and why you are making changes
- Eat regularly as hunger increases the desire for a drink
- The way you think about yourself affects your urge to drink so it's important to think in helpful ways
- Avoid situations that may act like triggers i.e. certain people or places
- Don't leave yourself at a loose end during your usual drinking time. Find something else to do instead
- In social situations find an interesting alternative drink and have support from someone who will support you
- Have ways to "Say No" to drinking e.g. I'm driving, I'm on medication, on a diet etc.
- Have specific drinking strategies e.g. taking out a set amount of money, starting later and finishing earlier or being the designated driver
- Have an emergency plan if things start to go wrong, this could be as simple as leaving the situation completely

My High Risk Situation Plans

What is the situation?

What can I tell myself that will help?

What will I do?

What is my emergency plan?

How confident am I out of 10?

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Support Networks

People with alcohol problems who have positive support do far better than those who are socially isolated and those who socialise in networks of drinking.

When asking for support from friends or significant others, be specific. This could include:

- Not offering you alcohol
- Not using alcohol around you
- Giving words of support and withholding criticism
- Not asking you to take on new demands right now
- Being part of your alcohol treatment as a 'network member'
- Learning about strategies that work (positive emotional and practical support) and strategies that don't work (nagging, criticising or controlling)

Criteria for Network Members

Care and Concern

They care about you and are concerned about the consequences of your drinking

Available to provide positive support

They live nearby or are available on the end of the phone.



Realistic about drinking

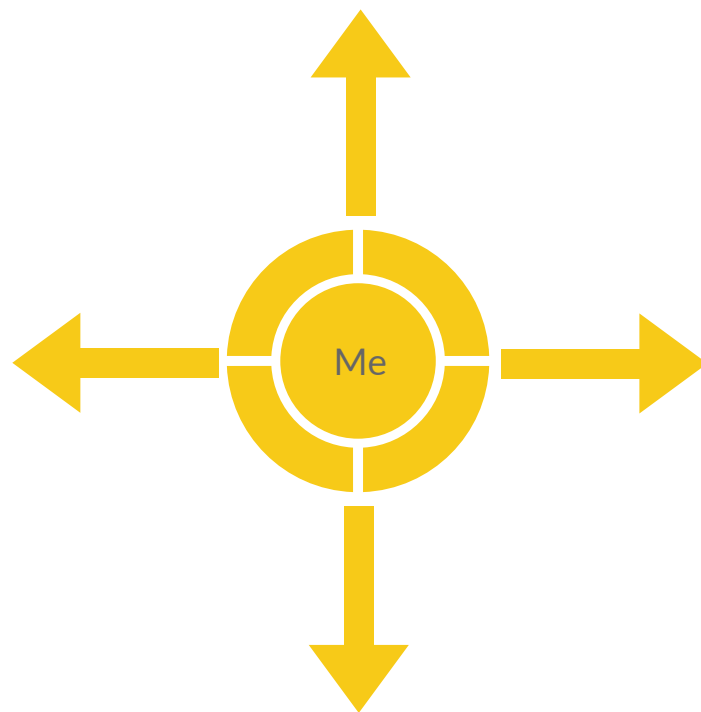
They understand about alcohol dependency and know the truth about your drinking

Enjoys life without alcohol

The network member shouldn't have a problem with alcohol themselves

Support Networks

We don't have to make changes alone, getting support from other people can help us to reach our goals. Who is in your network? Use this page to map out who can help you. Then write down some actions you can take to help you build your network



Actions

Coping with boredom

Drinking tends to increase when engaged with passive activities (like watching T.V) or when feeling bored. Keeping busy with active hobbies or past-times tends to reduce consumption and improves your well-being. Generating pleasant activities creates an appetite for more activities. Consider the items below and make a list of things you could do.

| | |
|--|--|
| Things I can do alone | |
| Things I can do with other people | |
| Physical Activities | |
| Intellectual Activities e.g. board games | |
| Productive Activities e.g. cleaning, DIY | |
| Restful activities | |
| Things that take a few seconds | |
| Things that take a few minutes | |
| Things that take a few hours | |
| Things that do not cost anything | |

Relaxation & Mindfulness

When we first become stressed and overwhelmed by an issue or an invite, our first bodily response is to make a rushed decision to help decrease feelings of anxiety. Some breathing and mindfulness exercises can help us to regain control in difficult situations or simply relax when we need to

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness can be described as making sure we are paying attention in the present moment, and doing it intentionally and with non-judgment. Mindfulness practices refer to the deliberate acts of regulating attention through the observation of thoughts, emotions and body states.

Many people use breathing exercises to help them , other people meditate. However you do it, mindfulness can help us to spend less time ruminating on the past and worrying about the future. This means we can stay more present in what we are currently experiencing - good or bad.

Breathing Exercise



Inhale for 4 seconds

Hold the breath for 4 seconds

Exhale for 6 seconds



Repeat for 3-5 minutes

Blow Out The Candle

Sit down



Think of your favourite smell – food, perfume, environment

Imagine breathing in that smell



Take a deep breath in and hold for 2 seconds

Then exhale for 4 seconds

Breath focus

Notice how it feels when you inhale and exhale normally. Mentally scan your body. You might feel tension in your body that you never noticed.

- Take a slow, deep breath through your nose.
- Notice your belly and upper body expanding.
- Exhale in whatever way is most comfortable for you, sighing if you wish.
- Do this for several minutes, paying attention to the rise and fall of your belly.
- Choose a word to focus on and vocalize during your exhale. Words like “safe” and “calm” can be effective.
- Imagine your inhale washing over you like a gentle wave.
- Imagine your exhale carrying negative and upsetting thoughts and energy away from you.
- When you get distracted, gently bring your attention back to your breath and your words.
- Practice this technique for up to 20 minutes daily when you can.

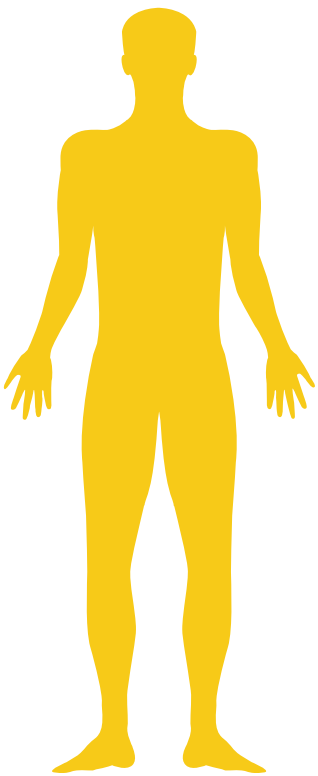
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

In progressive muscle relaxation, you tense a group of muscles as you breathe in, and you relax them as you breathe out. You work on your muscle groups in a certain order.

Practicing progressive muscle relaxation for a few weeks will help you get better at this skill, and in time you will be able to use this method to relieve stress. If you have trouble falling asleep, this method may also help with your sleep problems.

Instructions

1. Take a deep breath in, hold for a 3 seconds and breathe out
2. Clench the right fist, feeling tension in the fist and arm.
3. Clench the left fist, feeling the tension in the fist and arm.
4. Make a frown on your face, feel the tension around your eyes.
5. Tense your jaw by biting your teeth together, feel the tension around your mouth.
6. Push your chin down onto your chest, feel the tension on your throat.
7. Push your shoulders up towards your ears, feel the tension in your shoulders
8. Push your shoulders towards the ears and circle the shoulders.
9. Breathe in your stomach muscle, feel the tension in your stomach
10. Press your heels to the floor keeping the legs straight, feel the tension in your calves
11. Then press your feet and toes downwards, feel the tension in your legs.
12. Continue breathing calmly and repeat



Things to remember

Practise for 15 minutes a day

Sit in a comfortable chair

Hold tension for 5 seconds

Let go and relax muscles for 10 seconds

Making emotional well-being a priority.

- Make time to do things that you love.
- Break habits of negative self-talk and thinking patterns.
- As much as possible, avoid people who are consistently negative.
- Be mindful of the things that you allow to influence your life. (Music, movies, books, etc.)

Making sobriety a non-negotiable priority.

- Apply things that you have learned in treatment to your everyday life.
- Do not go to places and events that are focused on substance abuse.
- Do not allow the fear of offending someone to compromise your sobriety.
- Keep reminding yourself why you're doing this



Self-care is any activity that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health. Although it's a simple concept in theory, it's something we very often overlook.

PsychCentral.com

Making physical health a priority.

- Get an adequate amount of sleep each night.
- Eat an overall healthy diet in order to feel your best.
- Exercise regularly; it is a great way to handle and reduce stress.
- Seek medical care when needed and take care of yourself. If you don't then no one else will.

Making mental health a priority.

- Make regular time to take care of yourself
- Be kind to yourself when things are going well and not so well
- Reward yourself for doing well (not with alcohol/drugs)
- Keep a gratitude list - everything you're grateful for (you can do this on the next page)

What am I grateful for?

When things are tough it can be hard to remember the good things we have. Write down all the things you are grateful for in your life. Sometimes when we can't sleep it can also help to do an A-Z in our head of things we're grateful for to help our minds focus on good things.

A large rectangular area with a dashed yellow border, intended for writing. The border is composed of short, horizontal and vertical yellow dashes. The interior of the rectangle is white, providing a space for the user to write their list of things they are grateful for.

Remember ACF & RRR

A.C.F

A Healthy Mind

A healthy mind is less likely to be engaged on substance use, when we are occupied with positive pursuits.

Take up a new hobby or go back to something you enjoyed.

Exercise releases endorphins and make us feel good!

Engage in self-care – take some time out for yourself

Clear Goals

Remind yourself of where you were and where you want to be.

Be specific and clear on your future goals – it's much easier to stay motivated if we can visualise where we want to be

Set small goals to reach a larger one – even a small step forward can help us to feel more confident and in control.

Focused Mind Set

Prepare, Plan and Routine.

Stick to routine, prepare what you are going to be doing over the next few weeks, plan your days to provide structure and reduce confusion.

Have plans for what you'll do if you get bored, boredom can be the enemy of recovery so making sure you know what else you can do will help you to remain focussed

R.R.R

Remain Active

This could be making sure you have a good work/life balance.

For other people it could be starting to make steps to go back to work by developing new skills or volunteering in the community.

Consider groups that you can engage with. Some could be recovery groups but how about cooking or walking groups? n damage.

Remain Positive

It can be hard to do this at times but by trying to keep a check on negative thinking we're better able to see situations clearer and feel better.

Sometimes that will mean reminding ourselves of how far we've come and what we've already managed to deal with.

Focusing on the present and using support when we need it can help us stay positive

Remain Stress Free

Day to day it may not be possible to stay stress free, however reducing the amount of stress in your life will help us to avoid turning to bad coping strategies.

Try making a list of what you need to do or accepting and facing your challenges.

Include some self-care and look after yourself by making time to relax. And use your support network if you are struggling.

Additional Resources

Apps

Sobriety counter

Quit drinking – stay sober

I am sober

Sobriety Quotes

Books

The Naked Mind – Annie Grace

The Unexpected Joy of Being Sober – Catherine Gray

The Sober Survival Guide: How to Free Yourself from Alcohol Forever
– Simon Chapple

Online Resources

www.smartrecovery.org

www.nhs.uk (Alcohol Support)

www.helpguide.org

www.drinkaware.co.uk

www.alcoholchange.org.uk

www.getselfhelp.co.uk