

# Visit 25 - Misconceptions About Relapse

# The Truth About Relapse: 5 Misconceptions Explained

## 1: All People with Substance Use Disorders Relapse

This misconception can lead to self-fulfilling prophecy for someone in recovery. While it is true that there are a high number of individuals in recovery that do experience relapse, it is not true that relapse is inevitable.

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# The Truth About Relapse: 5 Misconceptions Explained

## 2: You Can Only Relapse by Using Your Drug of Choice

If you believe this misconception, you are setting yourself up for potential problems during recovery. Most professional addiction counselors have come to realize that the relapse starts before the person actually begins abusing a drug again. People most often relapse as a result of being exposed to stress or other high-risk situations and do not use or have difficulty using the coping methods they learned in recovery (see Marlatt & Donovan, 2005).

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A relapse in addiction is a result of a return to an old, dysfunctional way of thinking and behaving. A person who switches from cocaine to alcohol is not addressing their dysfunctional behavior or its causes. Instead, they are simply substituting one dysfunctional coping mechanism for another one.

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## 3: Those Who Relapse Lack Motivation

This is a common misconception that friends or family members of people in recovery often believe. Many clinicians who treat substance use disorders consider relapse to be a part of the recovery process for some. Someone working towards a very difficult goal will often experience numerous failures before they reach that goal.

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## 4: Relapse Means Treatment Has Failed

Recovery is a process and often involves many adjustments to a person's way of thinking, behaving and feeling. There is no reason to believe that a relapse is a sign of treatment failure. What it does mean is that the recovery program needs an adjustment in order to make it more effective.

This is not the same thing as saying one must relapse in order to develop the best recovery plan. Instead, relapse can be a sign that improvements and adjustments need to be made in the recovery plan.

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## 5: When Relapse Occurs, All Progress is Lost

This misconception is fueled by many stereotypic depictions in the media where a person experiences a relapse and immediately goes back to being a hopeless addict. If we view relapse as the result of a mistake or oversight in one's recovery plan, then we can also view relapse as an opportunity to learn. This is not to say that one must relapse in order to learn, but one can learn from the conditions that led to the relapse.