

The Relationship Between the Phases of Addiction and Relapse

The phases of addiction are a series of stages that an individual undergoes as they become increasingly more dependent on drugs or alcohol. The specific phases and their order are not absolute and could vary among individuals, but common patterns emerge.

The interdependency between the phases of addiction and relapse are important to understand when developing effective prevention and treatment strategies. For clarity, those in addiction recovery need to be cognizant of potential relapse triggers and have a pre planned response to mitigate them.



PHASES OF ADDICTION

Experimentation

In this initial stage, the person tries a substance for the first time or on random occasions without setting any patterns of use. This stage can be characterized by a number of catalysts including, but not limited to:

- Curiosity
- Peer pressure
- Stress
- Family history of drug use
- Mental health problems

Tolerance

If a person continues down the path of experimentation on a routine basis, a distinct pattern of use takes shape. A tolerance builds that may eventually require more drugs and alcohol, at shorter intervals to reach the desired “place”.

Beyond any applicable laws, phase two is the metamorphic “slippery slope”. Will this be the college stories you tell your grandkids, or will your entire life unravel from here?

Abuse

At this phase, usage can be characterized as a substance use disorder (SUD). You are literally using the substances in a dangerous manner.

Taking part in previously abnormal behaviors that lean toward the risky and dangerous, during drug and alcohol use, or indulging in negative practices for use. The slope is slipping into a downward spiral in this phase.

Dependence

In this stage, your mind and body have formed a deep connection with the substance and quitting may be more difficult than just making a decision with your brain.

Withdrawal symptoms can make your body think that the only way to survive happily is to continue on with use.

Withdrawal can affect the psychological, physical, or a combination of both.

Addiction

This is the starkest phase of the ordeal. This stage is characterized by a complete loss of control, the alcohol and/or drugs are intertwined into everything that the person does, despite the negative consequences to their life. If they are able to see what is happening, they may not think there is hope or a solution to escape the revolving doors.

This chronic disease has no cure. However, there are many effective treatments that can be personalized for the person and substance use disorder that can foster happiness where it was thought to be gone forever.

Relapse

This stage is a reminder that addiction is a work in progress. A relapse occurs when a person in addiction recovery starts to use again. Support is the key to recovering from relapse and continuing recovery with a renewed purpose.



STAGES OF RELAPSE

Relapse can happen at any phase.

- In the experimentation phase, relapse can be using a substance more regularly
- In the dependency phase, a substance may relapse, leading to more dangerous usage.
- Even those in recovery from addiction can relapse and return to using the substance.

The underlying process is that relapse advances recovery back toward a more dangerous phase.

Relapse can be triggered by the factors of any phase.

Similar factors that lead to addiction can contribute to relapse. But it does not mean that the person has failed. Some factors include:

- **Stress** - High stress levels can lead to relapse as a coping mechanism.

- **Peer pressure** - Being around drug and alcohol users can create strong temptations to relapse even if not pressured directly.
- **Memory Triggers**- Situations that remind a person of using can quickly lead to the mindset that drugs and alcohol will resolve all issues.

Relapse can intensify an earlier phase.

A person who relapses after the recovery stage may restart use with an increased amount and frequency, compared to before getting sober.

IN CONCLUSION

Examining the relationship between phases of addiction and the potential for relapse is crucial for instituting effective prevention and treatment strategies. The phases of addiction lead toward a state of complete loss of control, the substance being in the driver's seat.

Each stage has its own set of obstacles, and a person can find themselves at any point at any time for any duration. Addiction is not fixed; it's an active activity with the potential to move forward or backward with just one decision. Luckily, relapse doesn't signify failure, it underscores the need for more support and possibly different strategies.

Recovery is a journey, and each phase begets the next if the right strategy is not employed.



To learn more about substance abuse disorders, visit [Addiction Helpline America](#) on their [website](#) or call (844) 561-0606 to Get Help Now.