

Mindful Recovery: Preventing Relapse Amid Surgical Challenges

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Substance use disorder recovery demands a lot of attention. This statement is especially true for those who have medical conditions that force the use of mood-altering prescription drugs. Without careful consideration and pre-planning, individuals in recovery from substance use disorder may be at risk of relapse when confronted with surgery or short-term pain issues. When such conditions exist, it is essential to be proactive and develop a well-thought-out plan for relapse prevention.

People recovering from substance use disorder have discovered that they need help from others. Additional help is warranted when experiencing acute pain issues. Your counselor, sponsor, addiction-informed medical provider, and any other "in the know" person in your support system can provide invaluable support to you during this difficult time.

With substance use disorder, the risk of relapse is always present, and pain is a sneaky issue that can be particularly problematic for people in recovery. It can be a relapse trigger for those in recovery. For this reason, people in very early recovery are encouraged to postpone elective surgeries. Still, it is unrealistic to expect that we will never have a medical or dental situation where pain management is required. You can safeguard your recovery by enlisting the aid of others as helpers, arm yourself and your providers with the latest information on addiction and pain medication, and adequately prepare yourself for the upcoming procedure.

Below are general guidelines for minimizing your risk of relapse.

1. During early recovery, postpone non-urgent dental work and elective surgical procedures requiring mind-altering medications.
2. Make sure that your medical providers know that you are in recovery and that taking mind-altering drugs can put your recovery at risk.

3. If you have to take mind-altering drugs for an acute medical issue, make sure that your providers (including anesthesiologists) know what you have taken, how long you took, in what doses, length of sobriety, and any detox symptoms you experienced.
4. When prescribed mind-altering drugs, have your sponsor, significant other, or an appropriate support person hold and dispense the medication. Limit medication availability to only a twenty-four-hour supply. The recommendations listed in this article are short-term, acute pain management, not for chronic conditions. For individuals facing chronic pain issues, it is crucial to develop additional precautions and a distinct set of relapse prevention tools.
5. Consult with all providers about substituting (when possible) nonaddictive medications such as anti-inflammatory medications, other over-the-counter analgesics, or other non-medication pain management tools.
6. Maintain your self-care routine, especially stress management behaviors. The lower your stress, the less perception of pain you will have.
7. Talk about what you are going through in your support group meetings to decrease isolation as well as urges and cravings. Ask others who have been through the same thing for advice and guidance.
8. Familiarize yourself with the concept of cross-addiction. Refrain from being deceived by previous addictive thoughts that may suggest you can now safely use Drug X simply because you didn't encounter issues with it before.
9. Be honest with your providers about any depression or anxiety you might be experiencing, and consider taking an antidepressant if suggested.
10. Gain an understanding of the distinctions between pain and suffering. Learn and apply cognitive therapy techniques to reduce pain by altering your perspective and thoughts.

11. Be transparent and honest in your communication with those around you. If you receive feedback expressing concerns about reverting to pre-recovery behavior, it likely signals trouble. Take immediate action to seek assistance before misusing medication or experiencing a relapse into substance use.

Individuals in substance use disorder recovery face many challenges, particularly when medical conditions necessitate mood-altering prescription drugs. It is of the utmost importance to plan carefully to prevent relapse during surgeries or acute pain situations. Seeking support from counselors, sponsors, and informed medical providers is crucial, especially during acute pain episodes. We stress the significance of stress management, open communication, and understanding the distinction between pain and suffering to safeguard recovery. It is also important to note that for chronic pain, additional precautions and relapse prevention tools are advised. These guidelines can empower you to navigate medical situations without compromising your recovery.



If you are in recovery and you are facing surgery, you need this guide. We will untangle the intricate web of connections between the dynamics of substance use disorder and the nature of medications that have the power to awaken cravings, amplify perceived pain, and trigger familiar drug-seeking behavior. It's a precarious dance, but armed with the right knowledge, you can navigate it safely. Let us be your guides in safeguarding the hard-won sobriety you've fought for. Together, we'll chart a course toward a future where healing and recovery remain unwavering, even in the face of pain and prescription medications.

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