

## Avoiding Relapse

Things to look out for, and things you can do to avoid a relapse.

Relapse is a relatively common problem in mental illness. Hence it is worth planning what you can do to avoid it. This leaflet helps you do that.

Firstly write a checklist of the key things that might indicate that you are having a relapse. These are different for different people but probably include some of the things mentioned here. Familiarise trusted friends, family and your community psychiatric nurse (CPN) with your relapse symptoms.

If you have difficulty picking out the key things that led up to mental illness, it can help to write out a time course of events, feelings and thoughts that led up to your illness. You can ask for the help of a psychologist to do this. Once you have a personal checklist, work out what you will do if the symptoms occur.

Noticing your symptoms gives you an important opportunity to do something while you are still just "at risk" of relapsing. Act quickly if you think you are having a relapse.

Taking your medication properly greatly decreases the chances of a relapse.

## Possible Early Symptoms

### *Thoughts:*

Thoughts of Conspiracy or Being Watched  
Having racing thoughts  
Trouble Concentrating or Restless  
Different or Unusual Thoughts  
Confusion

### *Feelings:*

Tense and Nervous  
Feeling Very Tired, or  
Having Too Much, or Too Little, Energy  
Sad or Depressed (especially about long term prospects), or  
Low (enjoying things less)  
Feeling Unable to Cope, Guilty, Bad or  
Extremely Anxious  
More Sensitive to Others

### *Behaviours:*

Spending or Doing More than Usual  
Sleeping too much, or too little  
Changes to Routines / Problems With  
- Eating  
- Work  
- Leisure  
Isolating or Cutting Yourself Off,  
Withdrawal From Society

## Steps to Take to Deal with Relapse Symptoms

### *What can you do to help yourself?*

USE COPING STRATEGIES - Take time out. Try to relax. Get more exercise. Avoid situations that exacerbate the symptoms. AVOID ILLICIT DRUGS

KEEP REGULAR APPOINTMENTS with doctor, CPN, social worker or someone else who will notice changes

LOOK AT THE CHECKLIST of your own early warning signs

### *What can family / friends do to help?*

CONTACT a trusted friend or family member  
TALK about how you are feeling and changes that you have noticed

DO AN ACTIVITY with friends eg go for a walk, play a game, a relaxing outing, etc. What can support staff do to help?

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT to see CPN, Doctor or Social Worker (? Ring Ward ?) DISCUSS MEDICATION issues with Dr. Some Drs will consider an extra supply of medication to take 'as needed'.

USE SUPPORT IN THE COMMUNITY eg User Groups, Day Centres, Manic Depression Fellowship, Rethink mental illness, Mind, SANELINE, Lifeline, etc.

## Useful Contacts

(Mental health groups in some areas produce directories of local resources. For example the “Mental Health Handbook” is published in Cambridge.)

### SANELINE

Ring 08457 67 8000, 13:00pm-23:00pm 365 days, for emotional support and information on mental health issues. This is run by SANE, a national organisation ([www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk))

### Manic Depression Fellowship

Castle Works  
21 St George's Road  
London SE1 6ES  
Tel: 020 7793 2600  
[www.mdf.org.uk](http://www.mdf.org.uk)

### Rethink Severe Mental Illness

{formerly National Schizophrenia Fellowship}  
28 Castle Street, Kingston upon Thames  
Surrey KT1 1SS  
[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)  
Tel: 0845 456 0455

### Hearing Voices Network

91 Oldham Street, Manchester M4 1LW  
[www.hearing-voices.org](http://www.hearing-voices.org)  
Tel: 0161 834 5768

### Mind: National Association for Mental Health

Granta House, 15-19 Broadway  
Stratford, London E15 4BQ  
[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 8519 2122  
Information : 08457 660 163

## Written by

List Manager: Mental Health Support  
Group at Cambridge University  
- a service user -

Using material from a forum of patients  
and community psychiatric nurses at  
Fulbourn Hospital, Cambridge, 2001.

### *Other sources include:*

Surviving Schizophrenia (2001) by E. Fuller  
Torrey. 4th Edition. New York: Quill.

Living with Schizophrenia (1996) by John Watkins.  
Melbourne: Hill of Content

*Thanks to the following for their help or  
encouragement:* Prof. Max Birchwood and  
Lisa Hewitt of The Early Intervention Service  
Birmingham, Terry Hammond of Rethink, staff on  
George Mackenzie House Fulbourn Hospital

### *Published By:*

Mental Health Support Group  
at Cambridge University.  
[www.srcf.ucam.org/mhsg](http://www.srcf.ucam.org/mhsg)  
email: [soc-mhsg@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:soc-mhsg@lists.cam.ac.uk)

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## A Guide for Patients Who Have Recovered and Want to Stay Well