

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)

Manic Depression Fellowship

Castle Works
21 St George's Road
London SE1 6ES
Tel: 020 7793 2600
www.mdf.org.uk

Rethink Severe Mental Illness

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

Hearing Voices Network

91 Oldham Street, Manchester M4 1LW
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
Tel: 020 8519 2122
Information : 08457 660 163

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and community psychiatric nurses at
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Surviving Schizophrenia (2001) by E. Fuller
Torrey. 4th Edition. New York: Quill.

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

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