

Avoiding Relapse Drift

How it Happens

Relapse doesn't happen suddenly. It does not happen without warning and it does not happen quickly. The gradual movement, however, can be so subtle and so easily explained away (denied) that often a relapse feels like it happened suddenly. This slow movement away from sobriety can be compared to a ship gradually drifting away from where it was moored. The drifting movement can be so slow that you don't even notice.

Interrupting the Process

During recovery each person does specific things that work to keep him or her sober. These "mooring lines" need to be clearly stated and listed so they are clear and measurable. These are the behaviors that hold the recovery in place and prevent the relapse drift

Maintaining a Recovery

Use the Mooring Lines Recovery Chart to list and track the things that are holding your recovery in place. Follow these guidelines when filling out the form

- Identify 4 or 5 specific things that are now helping you stay sober (i.e. working out for 20 minutes, 3x weekly).
- Include items such as exercise, therapist and group appointments, scheduling, outside meetings, eating patterns, etc.
- Do not list attitudes. These are not as easy to measure and track as behaviors.
- Note specific people or places that are known triggers and need to be avoided.

The checklist should be completed regularly. When two or more items cannot be checked it means that relapse drift is happening. Sometimes things loosen your lines. Vacations, illnesses, and holidays are things that usually cannot be controlled. The mooring lines may disappear. Many people do relapse during these times. Use the chart to recognize when you are more likely to relapse and decide what to do to keep this from happening.