

Preventing a PTSD Relapse

Experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be a frightening and upsetting experience. Once in recovery, it is important to participate in preventive behaviors to avoid having a relapse.

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Monitor “Self-Talk”

“self-talk” refers to your internal thoughts-that constant voice inside your head that is like a running commentary. Self-talk can be neutral, positive or negative. This can include thoughts which are unreasonable, cynical, destructive, hurtful, manipulative or avoidant. It is important to monitor negative thoughts, as they can lead to the recurrence of PTSD symptoms. When you catch yourself having negative thoughts, try to counteract them by:

- Think in terms of specifics rather than generalizing
- Focus on your own choices rather than worrying about others’ intentions and actions
- Understand that even difficult problems can have solutions
- Identify positives of the situation, no matter how small they seem
- Concentrate on the present and contemplate “what is” instead of “what could have been”
- Ask someone you trust to help you talk through your negative thoughts and/or feelings.

Identify Goals for Yourself

Identifying your goals may be crucial to prevent a relapse. Take the time to think about your goals and write them down.

For example, your goal may be to have a daily yoga routine for relaxation. Consider setting an appropriate time frame to achieve your goal. You can always adjust your time frame if you feel it is not working once the goal is initiated.

Then identify actions to help you attain the goal. For example: schedule a daily time to engage in the goal needed, ask a friend for help in achieving the goal. In addition, identify any action which may hinder your progress towards the goal. For example: eating excessive junk food, sitting down for long periods of time, not following a sleep routine, etc.

Doing this for all of your short and long-term goals will help you focus on behaviors to improve your life and avoid those situations that may lead to the return of PTSD symptoms.

Common Warning Signs of Relapse

Being aware of common warning signs of PTSD relapse is important to help you identify them early in order to prevent reoccurrence of symptoms. Generally, warning signs may include the following:

- Changes in emotion (feeling depressed, anxious, nervous, irritated, etc.)
- Changes in behavior (isolating from social activities, drinking more, losing interest in favorite activities, sleeping less, etc.)
- Changes in thought and attitude (having negative thoughts, feeling hopeless, being self-critical, feeling sorry for yourself, etc.)

Identify Your Own Warning Signs

Having PTSD may prevent you from fully participating in daily activities. Being able to identify your own warning signs can be beneficial in proving your level of daily functioning.

Reflect on whether you have ever experience any of the changes listed above prior to experiencing PTSD symptoms in the past. Also think about any additional warning signs you have noticed in yourself which are not listed above.

Consider jotting down all of these warning signs to compile a list for yourself. Categorize the warning signs under three categories: changes in emotions; changes in behaviors; and changes in thought and attitude. Add any other categories, if you feel you have experience a warning signs of a different nature.

The list will help you identify a warning sign quickly so you can work to counteract it. Although it is difficult to identity every warning sign you may encounter, the list is a great start to identifying your own warning signs.

Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov
- Nation Center for PTSD: www.ptsd.va.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America: www.adaa.org
- PTSD Alliance: www.ptsdalliance.org

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