

# Preventing and Managing Lapses in Overcoming Your Anxiety

## **Objective**

This worksheet will assist you in developing an awareness of when you are at risk for a lapse by identifying early warning signs (triggers and symptoms) and how to appropriately respond.

## **What is a lapse?**

As you start to successfully manage your anxiety, you will see that your symptoms will begin to decrease or even disappear. However, you should know that at some point there may be a temporary reappearance of symptoms. This is called a lapse and it is common. The more prepared you are for a lapse to happen in the future, the more likely it is that you will successfully get through it.

Lapses can occur while you are still in therapy or months after you've finished your treatment. Lapses tend to happen during times of high stress, when you allow yourself to loosen up on using your coping skills, or start to make unhealthy choices. It is wise to develop a plan to respond to a lapse now, so that you know what to do if and when it happens. When you manage your lapses, you are actively decreasing the risk that a relapse will occur.

**What are the people, places, thoughts, behaviors or things that trigger your anxiety?  
In other words, what makes you anxious?**

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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Write down the main symptoms you felt when you first began therapy. Try to be as specific as possible for this exercise, because the longer you live without the symptoms of anxiety, the more difficult it may be to look back and remember how much they once impacted your life.**

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**Write down the coping skills that you have found most helpful in decreasing your anxiety so far in therapy. Try including details about why these skills have helped you or why you liked using them. You'll want to revisit these coping skills if a lapse comes up.**

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**Quick Tips Prevent or Manage a Lapse:**

- Lapses are normal because stress is normal.
- Lapses can be clues to stress and anxiety that you may not have been aware of.
- Be patient. Remember that change takes time and that a lapse does not mean you are back at square one with your therapy.
- Do not avoid your anxiety. Be honest with yourself about your symptoms and what you are doing to cope with them.
- Reach out to someone if you need help. You do not have to suffer through anxiety alone.
- If you see symptoms creeping up, do not give up on yourself! A lapse can be discouraging, but you always have a choice to work through it.
- Do not mask your anxiety. Be careful of behaviors that temporarily give you comfort but limit your ability to make healthy choices, such as drinking alcohol. If you find yourself drinking more than usual, it may be a sign that you are masking some stress or anxiety.
- Live a balanced life. Managing anxiety is not just about coping skills. A healthy diet, restful sleep, exercise, safety, and recreation all contribute to an anxiety-free life.
- If you have been prescribed medication for your anxiety, keep taking it as prescribed. Talk with your doctor if you are thinking about stopping.