

Addiction recovery in a time of isolation

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Recovering from alcohol or drug addiction is a long and challenging process. You will hear people talk about sobriety as a full time job. A recent news article highlighted one expert's experience of seeing more relapses since COVID-19, with the associated disruption in treatment. Although it is impossible, at present, to know whether this is a trend, it warrants our attention now, as there are millions of Americans who struggle with addiction.

For millions throughout the world, one of the constant avenues of support is Alcoholics Anonymous and the closely related Narcotics Anonymous and Al-Anon. These mutual support groups are at the heart and soul of the 12-step model of addiction treatment. However, such groups have been largely shuttered in person due to social distancing and shelter-in-place orders. Likewise, other treatment programs have had to temporarily stop in person services, leaving many reeling with a lack of critical support.

The concern goes well beyond lack of access to support or treatment. There are various risk factors present that may increase risk of relapse.

- Anxiety is ubiquitous—and anxiety can be a major trigger for use.
- Isolation is expected—this provides more opportunity for boredom and more opportunity to use without others knowing.
- Financial stress is likely present—Stress associated with potential job loss, or the general economic downturn may lead to feelings of depression, increasing potential for relapse.
- Lack of primary support—As COVID-19 has isolated us socially, it also is isolating from parents, children, or other key supports.



And for every person struggling with addiction or to maintain sobriety, it is important to remember that the current circumstances do not preclude many helpful things, such as: phone calls to loved ones, exercise, engaging in meaningful activity, and continuing to take one day at a time.

If you or someone you know needs more information about addiction treatment or support, these websites may be helpful:

- aa.org (Alcoholics Anonymous)
- hazelden.org (Hazelden Betty Ford)
- samhsa.gov/coronavirus (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

Everyone familiar with the 12-step model of sobriety knows about the concept of taking one day at a time. I only have control over my actions today, in this moment. Tomorrow is too far away and outside of my control. This sentiment should apply to us all, particularly at a time of such uncertainty about what tomorrow, next week, or next month may hold. If we take one day at a time, we will get through this together.