

ALCOHOL SUPPORT & INFORMATION

# Relapse Prevention help for you to manage change



## Relapse prevention self-help pack

Now that you have decided to stop drinking, where do you go from here? Up to now alcohol has been a significant part of your life. It may have influenced your lifestyle, people you met and things you did. It's now time to make changes.

Here are some common sense first steps you can make to get started on your road to recovery:

- **Tell your family and friends about your decision to stop drinking.** You may get mixed reactions from them. Some may be more encouraging than others. You might hear things like "I've heard it all before" or "a couple of drinks can't do any harm". Don't let this get you down or let anyone persuade you to have a drink when you know the consequences.
- **Identify support from friends or family members.** Within your network of people there will be those who will support your choice to give up drinking. Ask at least one of them to be your 'supporter'. This is someone who can listen and give you words of encouragement if you are having difficulty. You can also get in touch with your services. The contact information is at the end of this booklet.
- **Avoid temptation.** Take some common sense precautions - make sure you've removed all alcohol from your home, avoid pubs and off-licences, and homes of friends where you know there will be alcohol. Avoid any situation where you may be tempted to drink alcohol. The more you avoid these situations, the less likely you are to give in to urges.

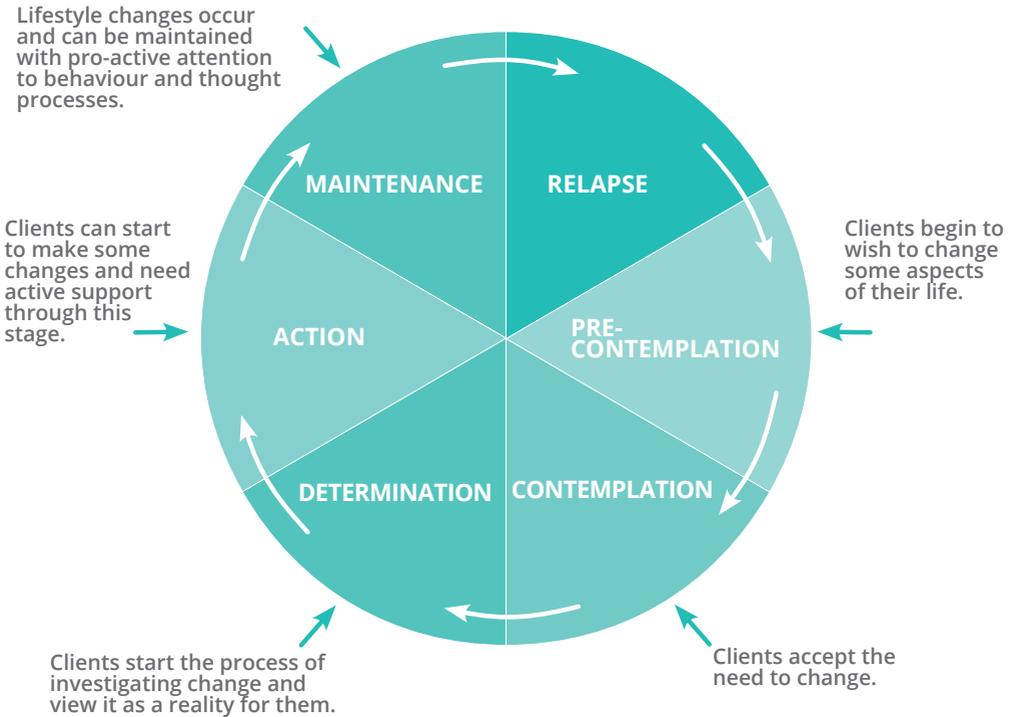
## Your reasons for stopping drinking

It is important that you know the reasons why you've stopped drinking. To help you feel clear about this, try to finish the following sentences:

1. I should stop drinking because
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. If I continue to drink, (what will happen)

## Be clear on your understanding of relapse

Many people take the view that if they take one drink, they will lose control and not be able to stop until they hit the bottom. This view is untrue - many people have short-term, minor relapses and take positive steps to get back into recovery ... there are many stages of changing...



You will likely have moments of clarity where you can choose to stop drinking. At these moments, it is important to act immediately. Write some positive statements about how you will deal with a relapse if it happens to you.

For example:

*"If I find myself in a situation where I end up with a drink, I will realise that this is wrong for me and leave the situation."*

*"If I'm in a relapse I will be honest with myself about the fact that if I don't stop drinking, I will seriously damage myself and my loved ones."*

## If I'm in a relapse I will...

## Use your support network

Think about the people in your life who are concerned for your wellbeing and want to help you on your road to recovery. Communicate with these people in any way you can about your willingness to recover. Tell them what you need them to do if you have a relapse. It could be that you agree with a trusted 'supporter' that if you relapse, they will be understanding, accepting and available to you when you need them. You could agree to call someone before or during a relapse and discuss what that person will do to help you.

Write down the names of **three people** in your life who will help support you through your recovery:

## Coping with your urges to drink

Although the physical withdrawal symptoms of drink should be gone within two weeks of stopping, you may still feel urges. You do not have to do what your urge tells you to do. You can notice the urge without acting on it.

Here are some tips to help you:

- Relax by taking a deep breath, exhale slowly and imagine the stress draining from your body.

- Reflect on what the urge is, what happens if you act on it, and the consequences of doing so.
- Don't give in to any thoughts that alcohol will make you feel better. Remind yourself of the bad aspects of drinking.
- Distract yourself with an activity that occupies your body and mind.
- Quench your thirst in a healthy way. If you feel thirsty, drink lots of water or fruit juice or treat yourself to a hot drink and your favourite cake.
- Tell yourself that if you resist the urge now, you will be able to resist again. The urges will become less intense and fade over time.
- Remember that urges are normal and you can choose not to act on them.

## What are your high-risk situations?

High-risk situations are situations which make you want to drink alcohol. Getting into high risk situations is not an accident, in fact we set ourselves up to get drawn into situations involving alcohol.

We might not be completely aware of this, but in the back of our mind we are making a decision to get drawn into a high-risk situation. Once in that situation, we are unsure what to do. We say that it wasn't our fault and there was nothing we could do about it.

Different people have different high risk situations. To identify your high-risk situations, firstly, read the following examples and put a tick next to the ones to which you can relate. Secondly write down a description of each situation.

Doing this exercise will help you to:

- be clear about your high risk situations
- allow you to be self-aware about your decisions
- act quickly if you get into a high risk situation

## I drank when...

NEVER    SOMETIMES    OFTEN    ALMOST ALWAYS

I felt unsure of myself in social situations or talking about my feelings or opinions

I felt threatened e.g. in an argument or having to justify myself to someone

I felt under pressure and couldn't relax

I felt low, sad, lonely or bored

I felt a feeling of loss

I felt physically low, unwell, in pain or needing to sleep

My friends or people around me were drinking

I wanted to forget my worries

I wanted to celebrate something

I overcommitted myself to plans and deadlines and felt stressed & anxious

I felt awkward about refusing a drink when offered to me

Something reminded me of drinking e.g. walking past pub, adverts, familiar people or places

I wanted to prove to myself or others that I could handle a couple of drinks

I wanted to have fun and feel good

I wanted to fit in

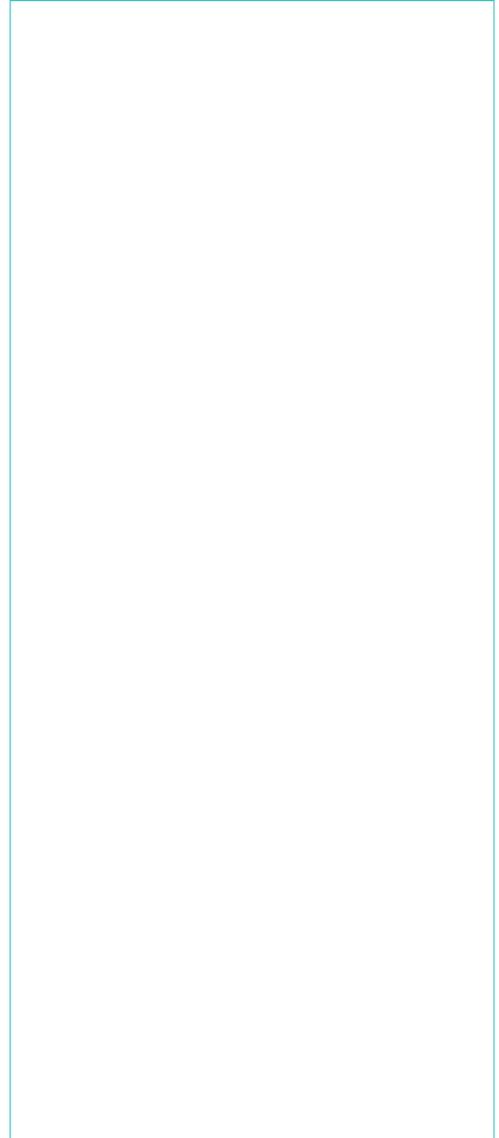
If you have ticked Often or Almost Always for any of the statements then this will help you to pinpoint your main triggers for drinking.

Now think about specific situations in your life that are high-risk, and write them down here. Now think about how you can deal with each of these situations.

**Your high-risk situations**



**Coping with your high-risk situations**



## Learning how to say 'no'

Refusing alcoholic drinks is not an easy thing to do. We all know people who try to persuade us to drink, even if we refuse several times. It can take a lot of courage to say 'no' and stick to this decision. It can help to practice answers to the question, "What would you like to drink?"

### Some examples of answers are:

*"Nothing for me thanks. I don't drink alcohol"*

*"I'm under doctor's orders not to drink."*

*"Can I have a glass of mineral water?"*

If someone is insistent with you, be firm but polite and say that you simply do not drink. You shouldn't have to explain why, unless you choose to do so. If you feel that someone is putting you under unnecessary pressure, then it might be time to leave.

During your recovery it is a good idea to be around people who are supportive of your recovery and avoid those who will pressure you to drink.

## Linking your problems to drinking

Can you see the connection between the drinking and the problems in your life? Try to think about, and write down, any problems in your life at the moment. It could be that you have an issue with friends, relationship with partner, broken relationships, difficulties at work or money issues.

Take some time to think about your life, what you feel could be improved or if there is anything troubling you. Write about it here:

Have a look at what you've written and think carefully if any of these issues are connected to your drinking. There are ways to address any negative feelings you have without turning to alcohol. If you can tackle the root cause for drinking, then you can begin to look at new and healthy ways of living your life.

## Why counselling can help you

Counselling can help you to address any underlying issues that you may have. Talking about it to someone who understands and getting clarity on it will help. You can also talk with your counsellor about ways of dealing with high-risk situations so that you feel equipped to continue on your path to recovery.

## Visualising how you will deal with a relapse

To help you manage high-risk situations, it is useful to visualise situations where you feel you might relapse. In a sense you are creating a story, or playing it in your mind like a film. It's important that you play the sequence of events in the correct order - think of it as having a beginning, middle and end.

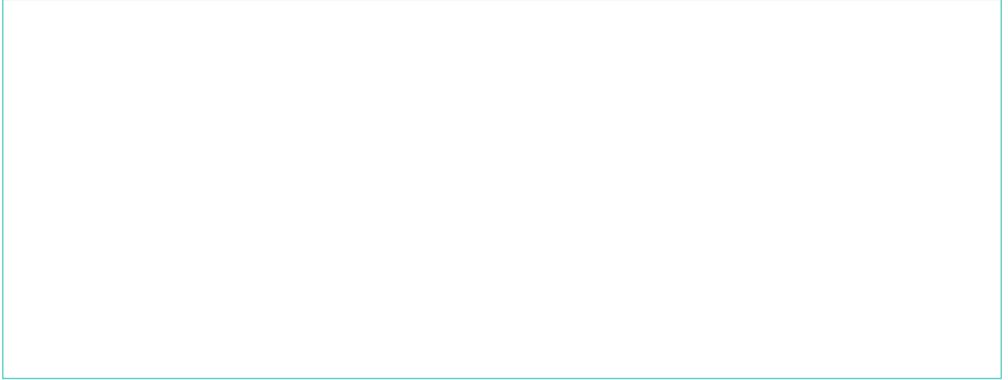
Think of a high-risk situation you might find yourself in sometime in the near future. Try to see the situation as if it's happening right now.

Imagine where you are, and what you, and others around you, are doing. Then think about the next thing that happens, and so on until you reach the end of the story.

After you have played it out in your mind, think of any gaps in the story. Try to think of anything that you have skipped past and make sure that the story runs in a logical order with nothing missing.

Now write down a description of the high-risk situation, answering the following questions:

1. Where were you and who were you with?
2. What were you doing and what were they doing?
3. What happened?
4. How did it end?
5. Is there anything else that you could have done to avoid a relapse?



## If a relapse happens

What you do after a relapse is important. If it happens, try to be kind to yourself and allow yourself the chance to continue with your recovery. Remaining positive and not beating yourself up are key steps to recovery.

If you experience a relapse it will help to:

1. Be honest with yourself. Recognise the following: "I'm in a relapse, if I don't stop now, I'm likely to ruin my life and hurt my loved ones. This moment of clarity will not last so I must act straight away."
2. Get out of your situation as quickly as possible. Remember that you do not have to explain yourself to anyone.
3. Contact one of your chosen supporters or someone close in order to get the support you need and allow the recovery to begin.
4. Go to a place that will support your decision to stop drinking. This could be a counsellor, a friend or family member's house, or an AA meeting. Try to do this as soon as possible after your relapse and get your friend to help you do this.

## Your expectations of yourself

Your expectations play an important part in your recovery. It is a well-known fact that the expectations you have about your ability to cope will directly affect the actual outcome. Therefore, if you expect that you will cope well, even in high-risk situations, then you are likely to cope well. If you expect to cope badly, then you will likely cope badly. So, recovery is about self-belief, believing you can do it. This means accepting yourself for your strengths and faults, accepting yourself after a relapse and moving forward.

## Positive changes and activities for recovery

Once you've given up drinking there could be a temptation to do other things that are unhealthy. One way of avoiding this is to channel your focus onto things that are positive and healthy. The following activities and changes to your life will help you to continue with a successful recovery:

- **Counselling**

An important part of your recovery will be talking to your counsellor on a regular basis. Research shows that the more time you invest in counselling during the first two years of recovery, the more likely you are to stay in recovery.

- **Self-help programmes**

There are self-help programmes that can support you, available through your Alcohol Agency or Alcoholics Anonymous. This is an opportunity to be part of a group, relate to others, share your experiences and get support in solving your problems. The more committed and involved you are in a self-help group during your recovery, the greater your ability to avoid relapse.

- **A good diet**

It's important to eat three well balanced meals a day or six regular small meals as well as vitamin supplements to help your body to recover. A healthy diet helps you to feel better and increases your ability to recover. A bad diet can cause depression, anxiety, strong mood swings, anger and cravings. Eating healthily will reduce your anxiety and mood swings and help you to feel strong.

- **Exercise**

Doing 30 minutes of exercise every day will help your brain to recover and help you feel better about yourself. Fast walking, jogging, swimming and aerobic classes are all helpful ways to exercise. Exercise is something you can do on your own or why not get one of your supporters to join you?

- **Stress management and relaxation**

The less stressed you are, the higher your chances of recovery. One of the best ways to keep your stress down is by putting aside quiet time each day to relax and meditate. Over time you will find it increasingly easier to relax as it becomes more familiar to you. Try using the meditation exercise below to help you get started.

- **Plan your day**

It's important to live with self-awareness, each day and take responsibility for what you're doing and the consequences of your behaviour. To stay aware, take time each morning to plan your day, and spend time in the evening reviewing your progress and any problems. An example of a daily plan is on page 13/14.

Take some time to think about these activities. Are there any obstacles that will prevent you from doing any of these on a regular basis? Write them here:



Think about possible ways of overcoming these obstacles and write them here:



## **Meditational relaxation exercise**

1. Sit in a comfortable position with your feet on the floor and your hands on your lap. Close your eyes.
2. Breathe in through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. While breathing out, say the word 'calm' silently to yourself. Then breathe in and again, saying the word 'calm'. Breathe easily and naturally, not deeply.

3. When any thoughts come into your head, just slowly guide yourself back to the word 'calm'. If you find it difficult to focus on the word 'calm', imagine being somewhere pleasant, for example a beach on a warm sunny day.
4. Do this exercise for 10-20 minutes.
5. When you finish, sit quietly for a few minutes and open your eyes when you feel ready. Take your time before standing up.

## Some tips on meditational relaxation

Don't worry if you find it difficult to relax, it is easy to get distracted at first. If you do get distracted, keep a peaceful state of mind and bring your thoughts gently back to the word 'calm'. It can help to have soft music on in the background. With practice, it will become easier to clear your mind and feel relaxed.

Try to do this exercise once or twice a day. It is advisable to do it at least two hours after a big meal as digestion of food seems to prevent a good level of relaxation.

## Your daily plan

Each morning, write down your main goals for the day. Add the recovery tasks you plan to complete and any other daily tasks.

**Day:**

**Date:**

GOALS FOR TODAY	RECOVERY ACTIVITIES
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

TIME	DAILY ACTIVITIES
6:00-7:00	
7:00-8:00	
8:00-9:00	
9:00-10:00	
10:00-11:00	
11:00-12:00	
12:00-1:00	
1:00-2:00	
2:00-3:00	
3:00-4:00	
4:00-5:00	
5:00-6:00	
6:00-7:00	
7:00-8:00	
8:00-9:00	
9:00-10:00	
10:00-11.00	

## Evening review

**Did you make progress today with achieving your goals?**

Yes / No / Unsure

**What did you achieve?**

**Did you make progress today with solving your personal and professional problems?**

Yes / No / Unsure

**Did you experience any high-risk situations? If so briefly describe what they were and how you dealt with them.**

Yes / No / Unsure

**Do you need to talk to someone about today's events? What is it that you want to talk over and how are you feeling about it? Who will you talk to and how will you achieve this?**

Yes / No / Unsure

# Taking the next step

For support and further information available in Fife or Tayside please contact:

## **FASS Alcohol Support Service**

Call us in confidence on

**01592 206200**

Access online help and support

**[www.fassaction.org.uk](http://www.fassaction.org.uk)**

**[f](#) @FASSFife | [t](#) @FASSFife**

## **Tayside Council on Alcohol**

Call us in confidence on

**01382 456012**

Access online help and support

**[www.alcoholtayside.com](http://www.alcoholtayside.com)**

Other National information and support can be accessed through the following organisations:

### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

Helpline: 0800 9177 650 | [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

### **Moodcafe**

[www.moodcafe.com](http://www.moodcafe.com)

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