

**Addiction and Recovery:
Five Tips to Prevent Cross Addiction Relapse
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Although definitions of "Addiction" seem to be continuing to evolve, addiction is still "a primary, chronic, progressive, and relapsing disease". The last decade of research has led to a refined definition of addiction as a "brain disease which is manifested by compulsive behavior".

Cross addiction means that an addict can be addicted to any mood altering drug which s/he ingests. Cross addiction can be an example of relapse and/or a trigger to returning to one's previous drug of choice. Cross-addiction usually refers to switching one or more current mood altering drugs for another or others.

The idea that you can change drugs of choice without the same negative consequences that you have been experiencing with your old drug of choice is very seductive to an addict. They want to believe that this is possible despite all evidence to the contrary. The song by Huey Lewis and The News, "I Want a New Drug", epitomizes the addict's steadfast search for a "new drug" that won't have all the negative consequences. This fantasy can have lethal consequences.

Switching one mood altering drug for another constitutes relapse. To prevent cross-addiction relapse, make sure that you are doing the following:

1. Really understand what you are dealing with. Make sure that you understand the nature of addiction, the nature of mood altering drugs, and the nature of cross-addiction. Remember that it is the mood altering properties of drugs that you are addicted to.
2. Identify your own defense mechanisms and errors in thinking that could make it acceptable for you to pick up another drug in place of the one you quit using.
3. Become aware of the experience of other addicts who have relapsed and the role that cross-addiction has played in their relapse. Did they think that their situation was different? Did they use some of these classic denial statements to make relapse acceptable: "I don't have a problem with alcohol (or some other drug)." "I never really even liked using alcohol". "I used it so rarely that it could not possibly cause me any problems to use it now, because I still don't like it". "If the doctor prescribes it, it must be ok". "I can't sleep and this helps me go to sleep".
4. Make sure that all of your medical support people, including pharmacist, knows that you have addiction. Question them about what they understand about addiction. Seek out medical professionals who are in the know. If you receive a prescription for something and are not sure if it is mood altering, call your pharmacist.

5. Be proactive and responsible. Read the labels of all medications, including over the counter medications. If it says, "may cause drowsiness", it could be mood-altering.

To prevent cross addiction relapse, give up any notions that you may have about being "cured" of addiction and being able to use drugs again without the negative consequences. Once addicted, always addicted.

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