

Addiction Relapse Prevention - Using the Cross Addiction Worksheet to Reduce Odds of Relapse

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Many people in recovery embarking on the journey to sobriety initially cling to the belief that they can maintain aspects of their former drinking or drug-using lifestyle. Initially, they may view specific substances as the sole issue. People with substance use disorder often try to ignore the use of other drugs, including alcohol, as problematic. The issue of cross-addiction is dismissed. Denial and other defense mechanisms hinder individuals grappling with substance use disorder from fully acknowledging the comprehensive effects of the substances on their lives.

Consequently, they tend to prioritize the impact of their current drug of choice, while past experiences with other substances appear insignificant in comparison. This limited perspective reflects a lack of insight into the broader scope of their substance use disorder.

However, the person's perceptions of the problem do not consider the "progression of the illness." Progression refers to the increasingly worsening course that an illness takes over time. With addiction, progression typically involves the development of "tolerance" and an increasing frequency and severity of negative consequences. An old proverb succinctly summarizes this progression: "A man takes a drink. The drink takes a drink. The drink takes the man."

Many individuals transitioning into recovery hope they can continue using "other drugs" without negative consequences. For people who are using drugs like opiates, cocaine, speed, or other "drugs," alcohol remains the "safe" alternative. Defense mechanisms allow people not to consider

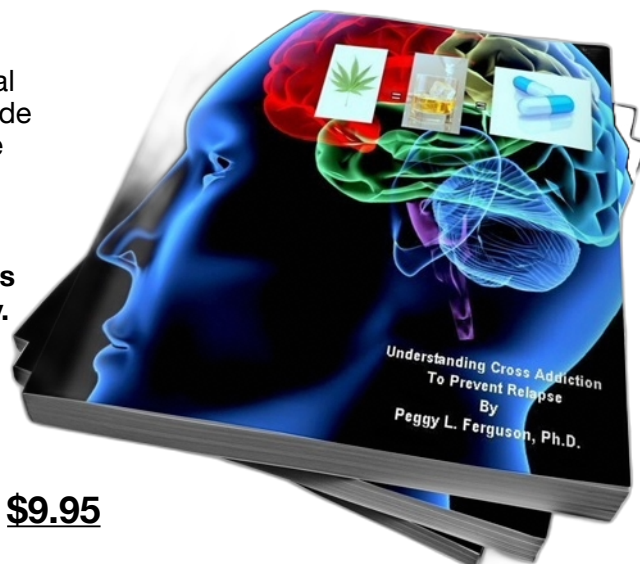
alcohol a drug. Initially, the idea of living drug-free may seem unfathomable. Yet, holding onto these harmful, counter-therapeutic thoughts leaves one vulnerable to relapse. **The Cross Addiction Worksheet** can help challenge these defenses and distorted beliefs. This worksheet comprises six questions designed to explore past drug use and its connection to vulnerability to relapse. Here are three of the worksheet items:

1. **Track your substance use:** Begin with the start of your alcohol and other drug use. Create a timeline documenting your first use, quantity, frequency, and any associated problems or consequences, even if you didn't recognize the connection then.
2. **Identify recent drugs of choice:** Reflect on the roles these substances played in your life—whether to enhance sociability, numb emotions, reduce stress, aid sleep, or escape problems. Think about the other drugs you have used for similar purposes in the past.
3. **Examine social influences:** Recognize the social and cultural context of addiction. List individuals you used substances with, noting the drugs involved. Identify those from your recent circle of friends who may still be using. Determine who you've chosen to distance yourself from in recovery and who presents a link to your past drug use.

Addiction is a brain disorder characterized by compulsive consumption of mood-altering substances despite knowledge of the problems caused by it. Once addiction develops, returning to casual or social use becomes a dangerous fantasy, perpetuating vulnerability to relapse. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2010 on this site. The content has been updated for clarity and accuracy.**

A simple guide for the professional and general information seeker, this relapse prevention guide specific to cross-addiction issues explain the nature of addiction and cross-addiction. It includes examples of how cross-addiction is associated with relapse and includes a worksheet to assist in relapse prevention. **This is a digital download, available immediately.**

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