

# Top 10

## Relapse Prevention Tips to Support the Recovering Brain



**ACADEMY**  
FOR  
ADDICTION & MENTAL HEALTH NUTRITION



# Top 10 Relapse Prevention Tips to Support the Recovering Brain

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Addictive disorders have long been recognized as having biochemical components, along with the psycho/social and spiritual ones.

Thus, we have found that supporting the recovering brain with food and supplements helps to prevent cravings and recurrent use, and allows a more robust engagement in the work of recovery. Sometimes, other physiological issues or illnesses are present which need to be identified and addressed for recovery to progress more smoothly. Practitioners trained in Functional Medicine or Functional Nutrition have the training and skills to effectively address these underlying drivers of distress.

Please see below for more resources.





# Relapse Prevention Tip #1

*A missed meal is a frequent cause of relapse*

When we miss a meal or have a very low protein or high sugar meal, our blood sugars become dis-regulated. To manage our blood sugar, the body releases adrenaline/cortisol to regulate things. This can lead to feelings of anger, fear, or dread. When we are emotionally vulnerable, we handle the stress of everyday life less effectively.

For the recovering person, this can lead to cravings and use to manage emotions and stress. A balanced blood sugar level helps keep us balanced emotionally and helps us remember to use our recovery skills. Research has shown that low blood sugar interferes with the ability to “say no”! It is good to eat at least 15-20 grams of protein every 3-4 hours, along with fruits and vegetables in order to maintain good blood sugar levels, and keep our brains well fed.





# Relapse Prevention Tip #2

*How much protein a day should I eat to support recovery and what type?*

We recommend that you eat a minimum of 15-20 grams of protein every 3-4 hours. This equals 60-80 grams per day.

Petite women might be able to get away with 40 grams a day, especially if their blood type is not O. O's seems to need more animal protein for optimal health.

Tall, robust bodybuilders need much more! 3 eggs equal about 21 grams,  $\frac{1}{2}$  c cottage cheese is about 20, as is a piece of fish or meat about the size of your palm. Protein is so important because the body uses it to make skin, enzymes, blood, and muscles along with the brain chemicals that help us cope with stress.

If we don't eat enough protein over time, the brain cannot make enough of these crucial chemicals, and we will start to crave our drug or behavior of choice. Our blood sugar is also more likely to drop too low, and low blood sugar interferes with our ability to remember to use our recovery skills when a stressor hits.



A bedroom scene with a bed, a nightstand, and a lamp. The bed has white linens and a wooden headboard. The nightstand is round with a marble top and holds a white lamp, a small vase, and some jewelry. A blue banner is overlaid on the top part of the image.

# Relapse Prevention Tip #3

*How's your sleep?*

Many people start using alcohol, THC, or benzodiazepine medications, such as valium or ambien, to aid sleep. The addictive process may then spiral out-of-control, and you realize you have to quit these drugs. You stop successfully, and now can't sleep again!!! Sound familiar?

This doesn't happen to everyone but may happen to some people. One reason for this is that the sleep-promoting neurotransmitters, such as Serotonin or GABA are now even more depleted than they were when you first started using. Over-the-counter amino acids such as GABA, L-tryptophan, or theanine may be very helpful here, to rebuild and support these pathways.

These amino acids usually work within 20 minutes and are ANTI-ADDICTIVE because they rebuild neurotransmitter systems, rather than depleting them so, over time, you need less-and-less to get the same effect, rather than more-and-more! Symptoms of low GABA are different from low Serotonin, so be sure to reach out for more information.



# Relapse Prevention Tip #4

*PMS? Really?*

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Research indicates that women tend to have increased cravings and slips pre-menstrually. We also tend to shoplift and get arrested more frequently during that time of the month! There are at least two biochemical reasons for this: serotonin drops near the end of the cycle as estrogen drops, and blood sugar becomes even more dysregulated.


Therefore, eating protein every 3 hours rather than every 4 hours helps, as does using the amino acid 5HTP or Tryptophan during that high-risk period. (If you are on an SSRI or MAO inhibitor, ask a knowledgeable practitioner for help). We recommend identifying PMS as a potentially high-risk time for you, and seeking extra support, along with the previous suggestions.





# Relapse Prevention Tip #5

*High stress = High risk!*



Sometimes, people have increased cravings following illness, pain, and periods of high stress. This can be because illness and stress eat up key nutrients in the brain, leading to a depletion of the neurotransmitters which help us cope with stress and stave off cravings. So, making sure you are eating nutritious food, adding in a good multi-vitamin along with fish oil, and taking amino acids to rebuild these all-important neurotransmitters can be very helpful.





# Relapse Prevention Tip #6

*Energy anyone?*

Fatigue and general tiredness may lead to cravings for sugar and stimulants in susceptible people. Fatigue has a number of different causes, requiring different solutions. A functional medical doctor or a Level 2 coach from the Academy for Addiction and Mental Health Nutrition may help you figure it out.

- Not enough sleep
- Not regularly eating nutritious food, leading to a deficiency in our energizing neurotransmitters. The amino acid L-Tyrosine can be very helpful here, along with improving your diet and eating protein every 4 hours.
- Lack of Omega 3 fatty acids from good egg yolks, walnuts, flaxseeds, wild game, cold-water fish, etc. Eating more of these foods, or taking fish oil supplements can start making a difference within 3 days!
- Low thyroid function. According to functional medicine experts, your TSH should be no higher than 2
- Hashimoto's Thyroiditis, an autoimmune thyroid disorder that tends to be under-identified, because it is rarely tested for
- Adrenal distress. Adaptogenic herbs such as rhodiola and ginseng can be very helpful here and are restorative, rather than habit forming.



- Chronic infection such as toxic mold, Lyme disease, post-Covid
- Low Free Testosterone in men. Many men who are long-term opioid users have low T. This may also occur in men with very low cholesterol, in those who are overweight, and in those who are older, or have nutrient deficiencies. Checking total testosterone is NOT enough. Free T must be checked as well, along with some other markers.
- Post-acute withdrawal from opioids! Many people have cravings for their opioid drugs a few weeks after they have stopped, due to profound fatigue. This fatigue is due to depletion of the Catecholamine neurotransmitters, along with Endorphin depletion. The amino acid L-Tyrosine is very helpful here to rebuild the Cats, and significantly reduce fatigue.





# Relapse Prevention Tip #7

## *Social Anxiety*

Life-time social anxiety often drives the desire for alcohol and/or THC. Learning how to relax and enjoy social interactions without these substances can be challenging for people in recovery. While sometimes social anxiety can be related to PTSD, an attachment disorder, or lack of social skills, often it is caused by deficiencies of the neurotransmitters serotonin and GABA in the brain.


Many of my recovering clients find that supplementing with a little 5htp, a serotonin precursor, (if not on an SSRI) along with a little GABA or Theanine just before a stressful event, can reduce this anxiety to manageable levels and allow people to enjoy social interaction and shine during a job interview or school presentation. And remember, amino acids are anti-addictive because they rebuild your neurotransmitters, such that over time you can take less and less to get the same effect, rather than more and more.





# Relapse Prevention Tip #8

## *Party Time*




Many people in recovery find parties, holidays, and celebrations to be high risk. One tip is to make sure you have eaten protein prior to showing up for a celebration so that low blood sugar doesn't hijack you into accepting that drink or hit. Taking the amino acid L-Glutamine prior to an event also reduces cravings and gives you more access to your recovery skills.



# Relapse Prevention Tip #9

## *The Change!*



The 2 years pre-and-post-menopause have been shown to be the most high-risk time in a woman's life to begin or relapse into a mood or addictive disorder. If you find that difficult moods or problem behaviors are increasing, please get your hormones checked and reach out to a functional medical practitioner for appropriate biochemical/nutritional support.



# Relapse Prevention Tip #10

## *Switching addictions!*

Many people don't like hearing this, but sugar is also an addictive drug! It can be quite easy for someone in early recovery to switch addictions to sugar because it is so very available, and tastes/feels so good!!!

This is because our neurotransmitters are very depleted once we stop our addictive behavior or substance, and the brain is screaming for relief. Sugar temporarily may bring that relief, but it may set us up for craving our previous substances, and leads to erratic mood and energy swings, along with weight gain and other metabolic issues.

Rebuilding our neurotransmitters with the right amino acids from the beginning, eating nutritious food with lots of protein, and keeping blood sugar balanced reduces cravings for sugar and can lead to a much more serene recovery process.





I hope these tips have been helpful to you and others. To learn how to effectively support the recovering brain or to find a Certified Recovery Nutrition Coach, please go to The Academy for Addiction and Mental Health Nutrition at [www.aminoacidtherapy.com](http://www.aminoacidtherapy.com) or email me at [christinaveselak@gmail.com](mailto:christinaveselak@gmail.com).

## Helpful Books

- Feed Your Brain, Not Your Anxiety, by Kristen Allott, ND
- The Body's Role in Addictions, by Jean Armour, RN
- How To Quit Drinking For Good and Feel Good: The NEW Alcoholism Story by Suka Chapel-Horst RN PhD
- End Your Addiction Now & End Nicotine Addiction Now, by Charles Gant, MD
- Seven Weeks to Sobriety, by Joan Mathews Larson, PhD
- Alcohol, Stress & Hypoglycemia, by C. Jean Poulos, Donald Stoddard, and Kay Carron
- The Mood Cure, & The Craving Cure by Julia Ross
- The Anti-Anxiety Food Solution, by Trudy Scott
- Feed Your Brain, Change Your Life, by Shelly Jo Wahlstrom

[Check out our Bookstore](#)



# About Academy for Addiction & Mental Health Nutrition



The Academy for Addiction & Mental Health Nutrition believes that all addictive disorders, as well as MANY MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, are driven by nutrient and neurotransmitter imbalances in the brain that can often be successfully addressed without the need for psychotropic medication. A stable, well-functioning, and well-nourished brain is required for clients to effectively address the emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual issues, which impact their lives and need to be worked through for a successful recovery.

We teach clinicians, treatment providers and health/recovery coaches how to reduce cravings and recurrent use, and improve the quality of recovery by using amino acid and nutrient therapy, along with diet to effectively address many biochemical aspects of addictive and mood/behavioral disorders.

[Check out our  
Courses & Offerings](#)

## Reduce Relapse! Save Lives!