

8 Tips for Keeping Up With Recovery During a Pandemic

Remember your goals

Keep your perspective

Create a routine

Reach out

Find a virtual group

Prioritize self-care

Explore new things

Practice compassion



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Even in ideal circumstances, addiction recovery can be difficult. Add a pandemic into the mix, and things can start to feel overwhelming.

Along with fears of contracting the new coronavirus or losing loved ones to its disease, COVID-19, you may be facing other complicated feelings, including financial insecurity, loneliness, and grief.

It's understandable to feel challenged by these worries, but they don't have to derail your recovery process. Here are eight tips to help you navigate the road ahead.

[name removed]'S CORONAVIRUS COVERAGE

Stay informed with our live updates about the current COVID-19 outbreak. Also, visit our coronavirus hub for more information on how to prepare, advice on prevention and treatment, and expert recommendations.

Hold on to your goals

The uncertainty you're facing right now might make you wonder whether there's even any point to keeping up with recovery.

Your social media feeds may be scattered with memes and posts normalizing drinking and smoking weed as ways to cope during isolation. And despite lockdown orders, dispensaries and liquor stores remain open as essential businesses, adding another layer of temptation.

Reminding yourself why you choose recovery can help.

Maybe your relationships have never been better thanks to the work you've been putting in. Or perhaps you're feeling physically better than you ever thought you could.

Whatever your reasons, keeping them in mind can help. List them off mentally, or try writing them down and leaving them somewhere you'll see them each day. Visual reminders can be a powerful tool.

Remember: This pandemic won't last forever

It might feel especially challenging to maintain recovery when your process involves things that are currently on hold — whether that's work, spending time with loved ones, or hitting the gym.

This disruption is unsettling and frightening. But it's temporary. It might be hard to imagine right now, but there will be a point when things will start to feel normal again.

Continuing the effort you've already put into recovery will make it easier for you to jump back into the swing of things once this storm passes.

Create a routine

Pretty much everyone is trying to find some kind of routine right now, but it's especially important for folks in recovery.

Chances are, a lot of elements of your pre-pandemic routine are off-limits right now.

“Without structure in recovery, you might struggle,” explains Cyndi Turner, LCSW, LSATP, MAC, an addiction recovery specialist in Virginia. “Anxiety,

depression, and fear can lead to unhealthy coping skills that offer immediate relief, like alcohol and drugs.”

If you can't follow your typical routine, you can regain structure by developing a quarantine routine instead.

It can be as simple or detailed as you like, but try to schedule times for:

- getting up and going to bed
- doing work at home
- meal prep and chores
- essential errands
- self-care (more on this later)
- virtual meetings or online therapy
- hobbies, like reading, puzzles, art, or watching movies

You don't have to plan out every minute of your day, of course, but having some semblance of structure can help. That said, if you aren't able to follow it perfectly every day, don't beat yourself up about it. Try again tomorrow and do the best you can.

Embrace physical distance, not emotional distance

Enforced isolation can cause plenty of distress, even without any underlying factors.

Isolation can be a key issue for people in recovery, especially early recovery, says Turner. “Stay-at-home orders cut people off from their support systems as well as normal activities,” she explains.

Although physical distancing guidelines mean you shouldn’t have close *physical* contact with anyone you don’t live with, you certainly don’t have to cut yourself off completely.

You can — and absolutely should — make a point of staying in touch with loved ones by phone, text, or video chat. You can even try virtualizing some of your pre-pandemic social activities, like a remote dance party. A little awkward, maybe, but that might make it more fun (or at least more memorable)!

Check out virtual support options

Support groups are often a big part of recovery. Unfortunately, whether you prefer 12-step programs or therapist-directed group counseling, group therapy is currently a no-go right now.

It may not be easy to find a therapist who offers one-on-one counseling, either, especially if your state is on lockdown (though plenty of therapists are available for remote sessions and taking new patients).

Still, you may not have to give up on group meetings.

Plenty of support groups are offering online meetings, including:

- SMART Recovery
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Narcotics Anonymous

You can also check out virtual support recommendations (and tips for starting your own virtual group) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

“Help is just a phone call away,” Turner emphasizes.

She also recommends indirect support, such as listening to recovery podcasts, reading forums or blogs, or calling another person in recovery.

Make plenty of time for self-care

Feeling your best can make it easier to weather challenges that come your way. Self-care is especially important now, both for your mental and physical health.

The only problem? Your go-to techniques might not be available right now, so you may need to get a bit creative.

Since your gym has probably closed and you can't exercise in a group, consider:

- jogging in an empty area
- hiking
- following workout videos (many gyms and fitness companies are offering free videos for the duration of the pandemic)

You might also find it harder to hunt down your usual groceries, but if you can, try to eat balanced, nutritious meals with fruits and vegetables to boost happy hormones, fuel your brain, and protect immune health. (Tip: If you can't find fresh, frozen is a great option.)

That said, if you're finding it difficult to eat, there's no shame in sticking with comfort foods you know you like (and will eat). Eating something is better than nothing.

Explore new interests (if you're up for it)

At this point, you've probably heard this over and over again, but now might be a great time to teach yourself a new skill or take up a hobby.

Keeping your free time occupied with enjoyable activities can distract you from unwanted or triggering thoughts that might negatively affect recovery.

Doing things that interest you can also make the time you spend at home seem less bleak.

Some things to consider:

- YouTube offers plenty of how-to videos for DIY projects, cooking, and crafting skills, like knitting or drawing.
- Have a few chapters of a novel outlined? It won't write itself!
- Want to go back to college (without the term papers and final exams)? Take one of Yale University's free online courses.

Sound exhausting? It's OK. Remember: Hobbies are supposed to be fun. If you don't feel like you have the mental capacity to pick up something new right now, that's totally fine.

Playing a video game or catching up on that one show you started and never got to finish are totally acceptable, too.

Practice compassion

Self-compassion is always a key aspect of recovery. It's one of the most important tools you have right now.

While it's often easy to offer compassion and kindness to others, you might have a tougher time directing those same feelings inward. But you deserve kindness as much as anyone else, especially during uncertain times.

You may have never experienced anything so stressful or life-altering as this pandemic and the physical distancing it's brought about. Life isn't proceeding in a usual way. It's OK to not feel OK right now.

If you do experience a relapse, offer yourself forgiveness instead of criticism or judgment. Honor the progress you've made instead of viewing relapse as a failure. Reach out to loved ones for encouragement and support. Remember, tomorrow is another day.

No matter how challenging things might feel right now, you've come a long way. Respecting your journey so far and continuing to work toward the future can help you stay grounded during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Above all, hold on to hope. This situation is rough, but it's not permanent.

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