

# What is a Relapse?

Weight regain usually starts with a **lapse**.

A lapse might be overeating during dinner for a day or two, or skipping your physical activity for a week while you are on vacation. Lapses are a natural part of weight management. At some point, everyone has lapses – small slips, moments, or brief periods of time when they return to an old habit.

A **lapse** is a brief and small slip in your weight loss efforts.



**REMEMBER** that by itself, a lapse will not cause you to gain back the weight you have lost.

A lapse left unchecked, however, can grow into a **relapse**. A relapse usually results from a series of several small lapses that snowball into a full-blown relapse. The most effective way to prevent a relapse is to identify the lapses early and deal with them before they turn into a relapse.

A **relapse** is a return to previous eating and activity habits and is associated with significant weight regain.

# The Relapse Chain

The **relapse chain** is a series – or chain reaction – of events that can lead to a full relapse.

Rose had adopted healthy eating habits and had made walking a regular part of her week, and then the following took place:

**1. High risk situation:**

Rose and her husband went for a long weekend at the beach.



**2. No plan for the situation**

Rose did not plan for how she would maintain her healthy eating and physical activity habits while on vacation.



**3. Small lapse occurs**

Rose decided “on the fly” that she deserved a few days without worrying about what she ate. However, when she got home she weighed herself and couldn’t believe that she was three pounds heavier than when she left for her trip!



**4. Negative thinking and no plan for lapse**

Rose became upset at the three pound weight gain and began feeling that there was no use trying anymore. She thought, “If I can’t just enjoy myself for a few days, why even bother?”



**5. Another relapse and no comeback plan**

Rose became further depressed and frustrated, and did not resume her healthy eating habits or walking routine.



**6. Full relapse**

A week later, Rose had gained a total of five pounds and decided against going to the next post-core session.

## **Keeping a Lapse from Becoming a Relapse**

In order to deal most effectively with lapses, it is important to be prepared for them.

**Step 1:** The first step in dealing with lapses is to recognize that 99.9% of all **people trying to lose weight and be active experience lapses**. Lapses can and should be useful learning experiences.

**Step 2:** The second step is to **resist the tendency to think negative thoughts**. You are not a failure if you lapse –you are normal!

**Step 3:** Next, **ask yourself what happened**. Use the chance to learn from the lapse. Review the situation and think about it neutrally. Then plan a strategy for dealing more effectively with similar situations in the future.

*Was it a special occasion? If so, is it likely to happen again soon? Did you eat because of social pressure? Did you skip physical activity because you were too busy with other things, or because of work and family pressures?*

**Step 4:** The fourth step is to **regain control** of your eating or physical activity at the very next opportunity. Do not tell yourself, “Well, I blew it for the day,” and wait until the next day to get back on track. Getting back on track without delay is important in preventing lapses from becoming relapses.

**Step 5:** **Talk to someone supportive**. Call your Lifestyle Coach, another participant, or another friend or loved one and discuss your new strategy for handling lapses.

**Step 6:** Finally, **remember you are making life-long changes**. Weight loss is a journey with lots of small decisions and choices every day that add up over time. Focus on all the positive changes you have made and realize that you can get back on track.

## Recognizing High-Risk Situations

Review the categories of high risk situations on the following worksheet: **emotional, routine, social, and other**. Circle those that apply to you, and write in your own high-risk situations.

### EMOTIONAL High-Risk Situations

Positive	Negative
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. You just got a new job and want to celebrate with good food.</li><li>2. You are on vacation, feeling relaxed, and enjoying being with your family.</li><li>3. It is football season and you want to enjoy all of the snacks and drinks that go along with a good game.</li><li>4.</li><li>5.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. You feel overwhelmed by the things you cannot control in your life.</li><li>2. You are feeling down and crave "comfort food."</li><li>3. You are angry, upset, or frustrated.</li><li>4.</li><li>5.</li></ol>

### ROUTINE High-Risk Situations

Positive	Negative
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. You are on vacation and staying at someone's home or in a hotel.</li><li>2. You are traveling and eating out for each meal.</li><li>3. The weekend is relaxed (or busy) and you do not have a structured routine.</li><li>4.</li><li>5.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. You are ill and cannot do your usual activities.</li><li>2. You are very busy at work or at home.</li><li>3. You feel exhausted and are having trouble sleeping.</li><li>4.</li><li>5.</li></ol>

### SOCIAL High-Risk Situations

Positive	Negative
1. You are at a party and do not want to stand out by not having cake.	1. You have an argument with your spouse, a friend, or a co-worker.
2. You go out to dinner with friends and everyone orders high-calorie meals.	2. There is tension or stress in your family.
3. Someone gives you a box of chocolates as a gift.	3. Your children refuse to eat the low-calorie foods you prepare.
4.	4.
5.	5.



### OTHER High-Risk Situations:

## **Planning for Your High-Risk Situations**

Part of successful weight management is having a **plan** to deal with your high-risk situations so that they do not become lapses. **Develop a plan. Write it down.** Look at your plan when you find yourself faced with a high-risk situation, or in the middle of a slip.

**Healthy eating:**I am at high-risk for stopping my healthy eating when:

**Plan:**

**Physical activity:**I am at high-risk for decreasing my physical activity when:

**Plan:**

**Self-monitoring and support:** I am at high-risk for missing a session or not recording in my “Food and Activity Tracker” when:

**Plan:**

# Planning for Comeback

Keep these things in mind while planning your comeback:

- Reflect on your progress. Remember your purpose.
- Remember that a short period of overeating or skipped activity will not erase all of your progress.
- Be kind to yourself. Stay calm and listen to your positive self-talk (while sending negative thoughts away). How you think about your lapse is the most important part of the process. If you use it as a learning opportunity, you will succeed. If you give up and stop trying to make changes, then you are at risk for a relapse.



## Comeback Plan

### Start using your “Food and Activity Tracker” daily

Make sure you write down everything that you eat and drink, taking care to be as exact in your portion size as possible.

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### Budget fewer calories

Decrease your calorie intake or increase your physical activity for several days to make up for your lapse.

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### Plan your meals

Start planning what you will eat at your **next** meal. Plan what you will eat for the next several days, including snacks. You might consider using pre-packaged frozen meals so that you know exactly what and how much you are eating.

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### Seek support

Call your Lifestyle Coach, another group member, or a good friend for a pep talk to help you start your comeback plan and to feel positive about your success.

# Your Comeback Plan

Think about what will be the most effective comeback plan for **you** to recover from a lapse and prevent a full relapse. Write down these steps and keep your written plan in a place where you can easily find it when you need it.

- 1. What two steps can I take immediately after a lapse to get back on track?**
  - 2. What negative thinking might get in the way of putting my comeback plan into action?**
  - 3. What positive thoughts will I use to keep myself going with my comeback plan?**
  - 4. How will I reward myself when I get back on track?**