

# Cravings and The Fog of Recovery

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In 1982, according to former First Lady Nancy Regan, the best way to deal with drug addiction was to just say no. After all, even if you are addicted, you only have to go through withdrawals once to kick the habit. Right? Well, it ends up that Nancy Regan didn't know what the fuck she was talking about. In fact, it ends up that she knew as much about drug addiction in the early '80's as Betty Ford knew about sobriety in the early 70's.

The truth is that once you are an addict, there is no such thing as ever being fully recovered. At best, we can only aim for a prolonged, stable recovery. For no matter how long you've been clean, or how much you've accomplished since you've stopped using, we all have our individual tipping points to which none of us is immune. You can have twenty years behind you of clean living and then suddenly, unexpectedly, the unthinkable happens: loss of a loved one, loss of a job, health issues, etcetera. Given the right amount of time and the wrong combinations of circumstances, we are all vulnerable to relapse, and the first calling cards of any relapse are cravings.

Cravings are often elicited by stimuli we associate with our past drug habits. Even after we're clean, these stimuli can trigger the same kind of drug yearnings we used to have during the old days. These triggers can include the people we used to do drugs with, the places where we used, and even the kinds of music we listened to while getting high. Combining these triggers with stressful situations can create serious challenges to the coping mechanisms which support our ongoing, stable recovery. And if that trigger-stress combination is just right, we can be overwhelmed and fall prey to relapse.

Relapses are quite common when we first get clean. In fact, I've heard it said that the average person relapses 5 to 7 times before they finally establish a prolonged period of stable recovery. As for myself, it took me 10 years to achieve that stability, and it was preceded by more relapses than I care to remember. That's because stabilizing your recovery is like learning to ride a bike: you're gonna fall down a few times before you get it right. So, it's not surprising that many of us wallow in the mud hole of drug addiction for quite some time before we can successfully hop on that recovery bicycle and pedal off to a better place.

Yet, what happens after years, sometimes decades, when out of nowhere we start having cravings all over again? I'm not hanging out with the same people anymore. I'm not going to the same neighborhoods I used to. I have a stable job, a stable social and personal life, and a much brighter future. So, why these cravings all of a sudden, and what are the triggers? I don't even listen to any of the music I once enjoyed while doing drugs. And worst of all, where's that dam recovery bicycle when I need it? Oh wait, now I remember. I traded it in for a car years ago.

The Fog of Recovery - that unexpected haze of cravings which seem to come out of nowhere even after years and years of stable recovery - can suddenly render the best of times into the worst of times. Without warning, it can spring open a trap door into the Pandora's box of our seemingly forgotten and discarded past. Yet, nothing is ever really forgotten, because even though some things may have lapsed from our conscious memory, they're really only sleeping with one eye open, just waiting for the opportunity to re-emerge, re-challenge us, and relapse us into drug addiction.

Fortunately, we grow and develop during our periods of stable recovery, learning new and more efficient ways of staying clean. Unfortunately, we grow and develop during our periods of stable recovery, often discarding our older coping mechanisms in favor of newer and seemingly better ones. That's why yesterday's bicycle is now today's car. But sadly, when your recovery car runs out of gas one day in the middle of nowhere, wouldn't it be nice to have your old, trustworthy bicycle on hand to pedal your back to civilization?

The Fog of Recovery hits us like a tornado, turning a once sunny day into a whirlwind of devastation. It can tear the very foundation of our recovery out from under us, leaving us teetering on the brink of relapse. But just like our first go at getting clean, the basics never change. So if you ever find yourself challenged by the fog's cravings, begin at the beginning by dusting off your old bicycle once more, even if you gotta go to the pawn shop to reclaim it.

**Also in this series:**

The Fog of Recovery (June, 2016)  
<http://trafn.com/fogofrecovery.pdf>

One Off's and The Fog of Recovery (July, 2016)  
[http://trafn.com/fogofrecovery\\_oneoffs.pdf](http://trafn.com/fogofrecovery_oneoffs.pdf)

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