

Coronavirus crisis could trigger relapse among those fighting addiction

April 1 2020



The social distancing and isolation of the coronavirus pandemic may put

people struggling with addiction at risk for relapse, an expert says.

Feeling stressed, isolated and scared may drive them back to substance abuse, said Dr. Lawrence Brown Jr., CEO of the nonprofit START Treatment & Recovery Centers, New York's largest independent drug treatment agency.

"Whatever structures used to maintain sobriety by people with substance-use issues tend to fall away in a [pandemic](#)," Brown said in a START news release.

"People who have lost proximity to support systems, programs and relationships that help them stay sober may be tempted to self-medicate in order to deal with stress, anxiety and isolation," he explained.

"In addition to substance-use disorders, many people are grappling with [mental health issues](#) and co-morbidities, including HIV, hepatitis C, hypertension [[high blood pressure](#)] and diabetes, that put them at higher risk for COVID-19," Brown added.

He offered advice for people struggling with drug or alcohol addiction during the coronavirus pandemic.

It's important to maintain relationships. Even when they're challenging, family and friends provide comfort and security, and hearing words like "I love you," "I miss you," and "I need you," can be therapeutic, Brown said.

If you're in a treatment program, engaging more substantially will provide you with even greater protection. If you have a history of mental illness or [substance abuse](#), take advantage of any prior resources to help you through this stressful time, Brown said.

If you can't go to a meeting or counseling session in-person, find out if there are other options such as tele-[mental health](#) or other distance counseling.

Many employers are offering resources to help people cope when working from home, and many states are offering additional mental health services to help people cope with the stress of the pandemic and stay-at-home orders, Brown noted.

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website has information about mental [health](#) providers in every state.

If you do slip, don't think of it as a failure. Rather, strive to identify what triggered the slip and, most importantly, forgive yourself, Brown said.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more about [drug addiction treatment](#).

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Citation: Coronavirus crisis could trigger relapse among those fighting addiction (2020, April 1) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-coronavirus-crisis-trigger-relapse-addiction.html>

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