What to do after a slip

Why one slip does not have to become a relapse, and what to do next.

Almost everyone who changes a habit slips at some point. A slip, or lapse, is a single return to the old behaviour. A relapse is going back to the old pattern. One does not have to lead to the other.

How a slip turns into a relapse

After a slip, the thought arrives: "I have blown it. I am back to square one. I may as well carry on." Shame and hopelessness follow, and the old habit is the quickest way to escape those feelings. That reaction does more damage than the slip did.

Thinking that leads to relapse

- "I have ruined everything."
- "I obviously cannot do this."
- "I am weak."
- "I may as well keep going."

Thinking that gets you back on track

- "I slipped. That is common."
- "One slip does not wipe out my progress."
- "What led up to this?"
- "My next choice is what matters."

What to do after a slip

1. **Stop.** As soon as you notice. You do not have to finish the bottle, the packet or the evening.
2. **Get out of the situation** if you can.
3. **Talk to yourself kindly.** As you would to a friend.
4. **Tell someone** who supports you.
5. **Work out what happened.** What was the trigger? What was I feeling? What did I tell myself?
6. **Adjust the plan.** What would help next time?
7. **Start again straight away.** Not on Monday.

My slip plan

The first thing I will do

Who I will contact

What I want to say to myself

The "what the hell" effect is known as the abstinence violation effect, described by Alan Marlatt and Judith Gordon.

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