

**RECOVERY SESSION:**

# THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD OF RECOVERY



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## DISCLAIMER

This resource is a living document and is open to change. It was created by students from within the Body Brave community and may not be fully representative of the spectrum of experience. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource or lived experiences that you don't see represented here, please email us at [info@bodybrave.ca](mailto:info@bodybrave.ca).

## UNDERSTANDING THE RECOVERY PROCESS

Recovery from an eating disorder can be a gradual and long process that can really benefit from encouragement and support from not only a multidisciplinary team of professionals, but also from one's friends and family. It's important to note that it is neither unusual nor rare that someone with an eating disorder might experience feelings of uncertainty about the progress of their recovery.

You may feel like you're stuck in your recovery, or moving backwards in terms of progress you've made when it comes to overcoming disordered behaviours and thoughts. These feelings can creep in for lots of reasons. Maybe you've recently relapsed, maybe you're experiencing stress or a significant life change, or maybe it's just a random Tuesday and not feeling great about where you're at.

When we start to question where we are at in recovery, asking ourselves if we are making progress, or questioning if it's worth it, feelings of doubt can feel overwhelming. This doubt can limit the progress we are continuing to make, and influence the decisions we make moving forward, including participating in structured supports like treatment groups or programs that provide necessary treatment and support.

Phrases such as “recovery,” “in recovery” and “recovered” are sometimes used interchangeably which can be really confusing, and make it hard for us to really understand where we are in our recovery journey. In this handout we will explore the recovery process, and hopefully offer some insight that can help you better navigate yourself in it!

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Recovery & relapse. National Eating Disorders Association. (2020, February 6). Retrieved June 1, 2022, from <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/learn/general-information/recovery>

Mainland, M. (2022, April 25). 13 eating disorder recovery affirmations. Recovery Warriors. Retrieved June 1, 2022, from <https://recoverywarriors.com/positive-affirmations-for-eating-disorder-recovery-warriors/>

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## SO...WHAT EVEN IS RECOVERY?

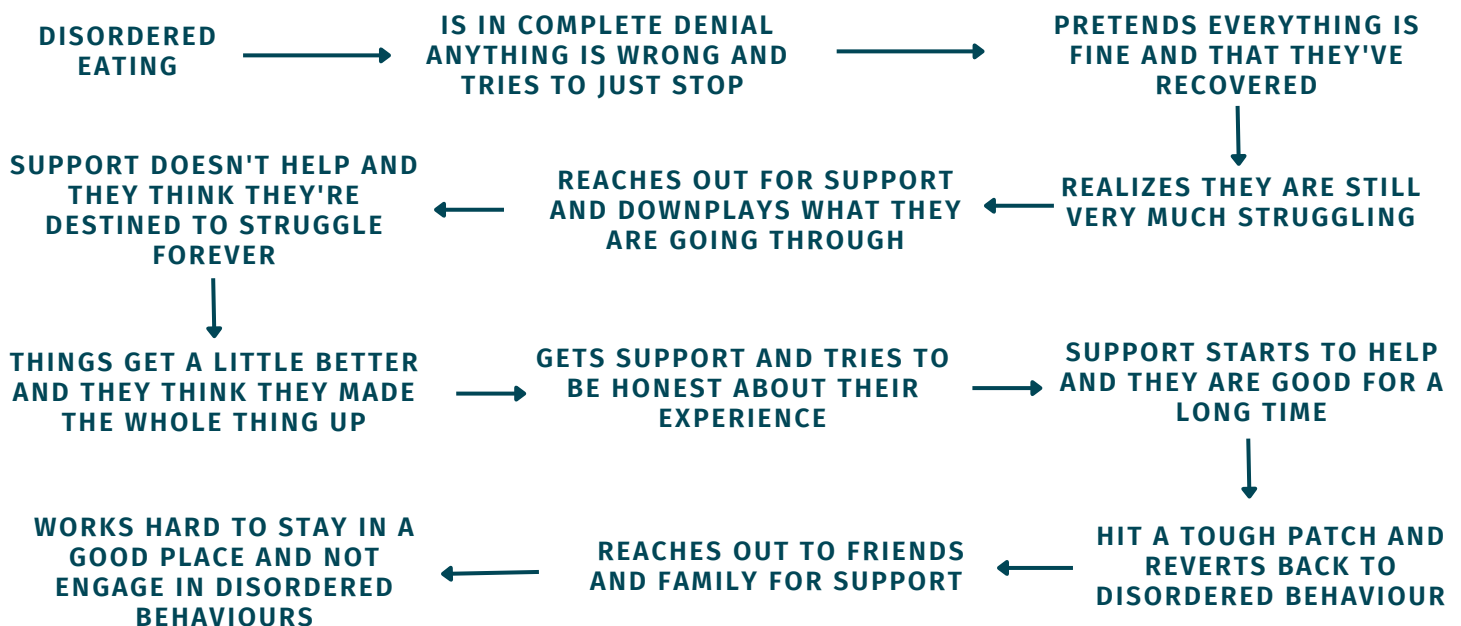
Recovery can be defined as the process by which a person overcomes an eating disorder. Now that's a pretty broad definition, and that's because recovery as a process can look ENTIRELY different for every single person. What works for one person might not work for another, one person's timeline in their recovery journey might be another person's timeline for even just starting to think about recovery. The fact that recovery is so broad and ill-defined can make it hard to really feel sure of where you are at, but it's also an opportunity to really engage with and define recovery *for yourself*.

Throughout their recovery, someone might engage in many different treatment options to help them better understand what they are experiencing, and to challenge the way they think and feel about it. In addition, they may also work towards improving co-morbid concern, such as anxiety or substance use issues, which may make eating disorders more complicated to address or recovery from.

There are ways that we might typically think about recovery:



But our recovery might look entirely different:



The important thing to know is that the recovery journey varies for everyone, not just in little ways, but in fundamental ways. This is why it's so important to not compare your recovery to anyone else's, and spend time exploring your own recovery process that feels good for you.

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## PARTS OF YOUR RECOVERY JOURNEY

### "IN RECOVERY"

The idea of being "in recovery" is a super broad term that basically encompasses a lot of the recovery process for folks, whether they are at the beginning and dipping their toe into recovery, or if they've been addressing their behaviour/thoughts for years.

Basically 'in recovery' is used to describe when a person is in the process of recovering from an eating disorder. And it's really for folks to decide for themselves if this where they are at or a label that would ascribe to themselves.

'In recovery' might mean someone is taking part in supports. For example, a person might be exploring resources and community programming aimed at supporting them as they navigate binge eating disorder, or they may be undergoing a day treatment program that is aimed at helping them manage their symptoms of anorexia nervosa.

The term "in recovery" can also mean that a person has completed an ED program or informal recovery process but does not necessarily consider themselves to be 'recovered' from their eating disorder. In this way, it's much less about the exact actions taken by a person or different 'steps' of recovery being checked off a list, and more about how they feel and choose to consider themselves.

### "RECOVERED"

When it comes to the later parts of the recovery process (ie. you're in a generally good place, have coping tools and resources and are in a stable place with your disordered thoughts/behaviours), this is where language and understanding our own processes might become important.

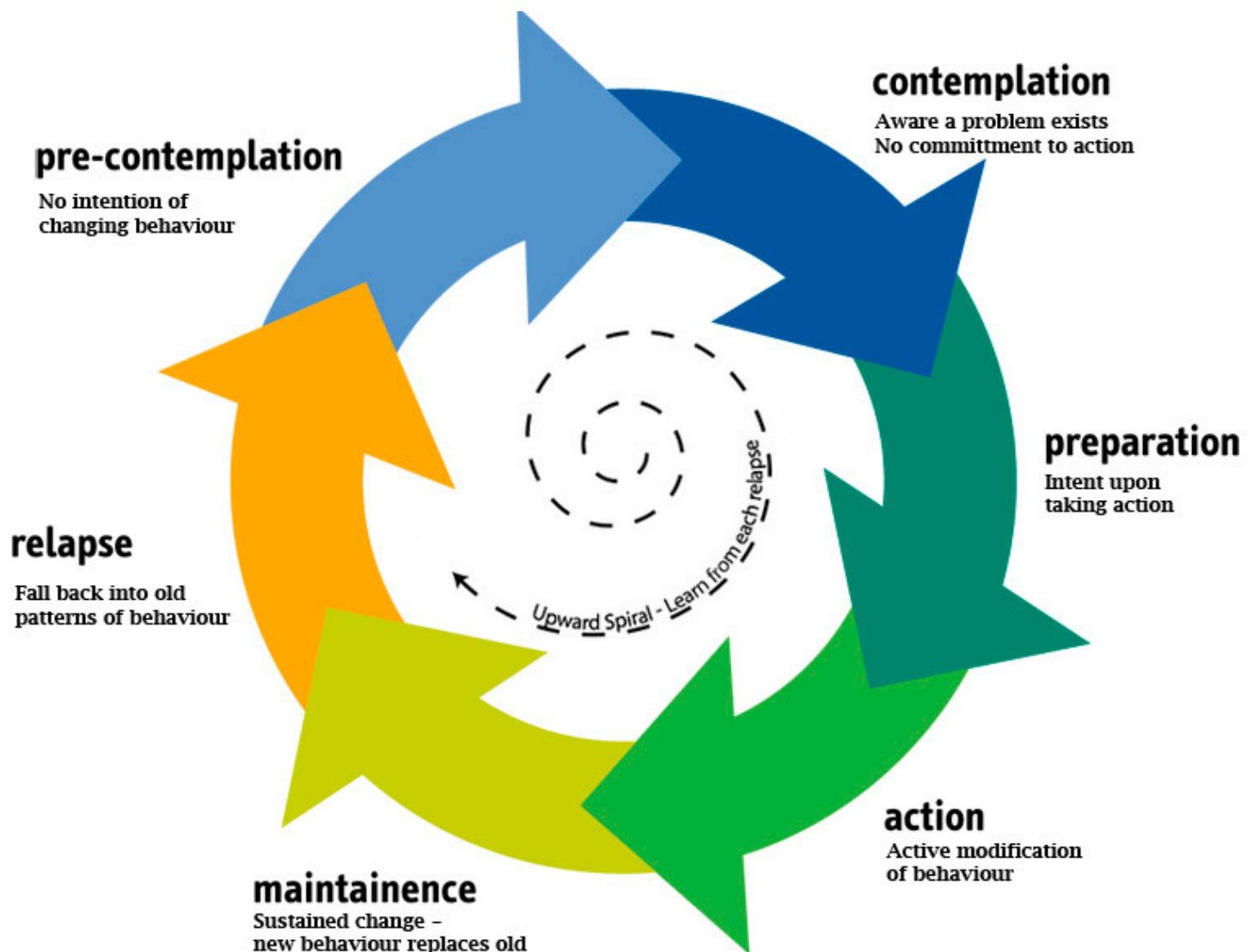
Some folks when they get to a certain point in their own recovery may consider themselves 'recovered' from their eating disorder. This is great! And if it feels like language that is empowering to you in your recovery then you may absolutely use it.

For others, recovery is an on-going life long process that doesn't ever feel like it has an official 'end' or that they are ever officially 'recovered'. And that is great too! Many folks see recovery as a choice that they make everyday and need to continue to commit to for the rest of their lives rather than a destination they will reach. If the idea of having to be fully 'recovered' feels overwhelming or altogether impossible then it may not be a part of your recovery journey and that is completely okay!



## STAGES OF CHANGE

The Stages of Change is a model developed by Prochaska and DiClemente, that helps us understand that the process of recovery is more similar to a cycle rather than a linear process. People may go through this cycle more than once or may need to come back to a specific stage before heading to the next. Someone might also go through more than one stage at the same time. For instance, if a person is recovering from restriction, they may be in the Action Stage (e.g. eating X times a day) while simultaneously going through the Contemplation Stage (e.g. concerns over body weight and body image linked to food intake).



## 1) Pre-Contemplation Stage

During the pre-contemplation stage, people are not considering a change. People in this stage are often described as "in denial," because they claim that their behaviour is not a problem. In some cases, people in this stage do not understand that their behaviour is damaging, or they are under-informed about the consequences of their actions.

If you are in this stage, you may:

- feel resigned to our current state or engaging in your current behaviours
- feel that you have no control over your thoughts/behaviour

If you are in this stage, you could ask yourself:

- Have you ever tried to change this behaviour in the past?
- How do you recognize that you have a problem?
- What would have to happen for you to consider your behaviour a problem?

## 2) Contemplation Stage

During this stage, people become more and more aware of the potential benefits of making a change, but the costs tend to stand out even more. This conflict creates a strong sense of ambivalence about changing. Because of this uncertainty, the contemplation stage of change can last months or even years.

If you are in this stage, you may:

- feel a sense of guilt or shame as you become more aware of your behaviour/thoughts and their impact
- feel overwhelmed at the prospect of having to address these parts of your life

If you are in this stage, you could ask yourself:

- What would changing your behaviour give you or add to your life?
- Why do you want to change? Is there anything preventing you from changing?
- What are some things that could help you make this change?

### 3) Preparation Stage

During the preparation stage, you might begin making small changes to prepare for a larger life change. You might start experimenting with behaviour or thought changing, dipping your toe into change. Or you might start collecting information about change, reading books about recovery or following ED recovery accounts on social media.

If you are in this stage, you may:

- feel both hopeful and overwhelmed at the idea of recovery or behaviour change
- feel more ready to explore support options and resources

If you are in this stage, you could ask yourself:

- What are the things you want to change (disordered behaviour/thoughts)?
- What support might you need to make these changes?
- How could you start to integrate change focused things into your day to day?

### 4) Action Stage

The action stage is where people believe they have the ability to change their behaviour and people begin taking direct action in order to accomplish their goals (changing their behaviour, managing their thinking processes, etc.). Action can look different for everyone depending on their needs! While this may seem like the most important stage, this is typically one of the shorter parts of the process. Taking action is really important, but the stages that come before and lead up to action are incredibly important to ensuring this action stage is positive and sustainable.

If you are in this stage, you may:

- feel A LOT of different things as you navigate the new information and support that comes from taking action
- feel insecure in your ability to commit to change

If you are in this stage, you could ask yourself:

- Why am I making these changes? How can I remind myself of these reasons when things get difficult?
- Are there people who I can surround myself with to reinforce and encourage the positive changes I'm making?
- How can I deal with challenges as they arise?

## 5) Maintenance Stage

The maintenance phase involves successfully avoiding former behaviours and keeping up new behaviours. Maintenance involves being able to successfully avoid any temptations to return previous negative behaviours. The goal of the maintenance stage is to maintain the new status quo. People in maintenance constantly reformulate the rules of their lives and are acquiring new skills to deal with life and avoid relapse. They are able to anticipate the situations in which a relapse could occur and prepare coping strategies in advance.

If you are in this stage, you may:

- start to feel increasingly self-assured as you navigate the world in recovery
- find yourself continuously developing new coping tools and resources as time goes on

If you are in this stage, you could ask yourself:

- How can I celebrate how far I've come?
- What things have I learned previously that I want to continue to put into practice?
- How can I prioritize myself and my recovery moving forward?

### and relapse!

Relapse can be really hard, and you can feel like you've messed up and are starting the whole process over. You might experience feelings of failure, disappointment, and frustration. But the reality is that relapse is a part of the Maintenance Stage, it's a natural and normal part of the process that is in no way a step backwards, it's helping you to soon make a stronger step forward.

If you are in this stage, you could ask yourself:

- What triggered the relapse?
- What can you do to avoid these triggers in the future?
- What might I need to reassess or explore more to help address this trigger?

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Prochaska JO, Velicer WF. The transtheoretical model of health behavior change. *Am J Health Promot.* 1997;12(1):38-48. doi:10.4278/0890-1171-12.1.38

Mastellos N, Gunn LH, Felix LM, Car J, Majeed A. Transtheoretical model stages of change for dietary and physical exercise modification in weight loss management for overweight and obese adults. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2014;(2):CD008066. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD008066.pub3

LaMorte WW. The transtheoretical model (Stages of Change). Boston University School of Public Health.





## AFFIRMATIONS

"I am courageous and starting today, I will prioritize myself."

"Making a mistake does not mean that I am starting over."

"Questioning myself is part of the process, I am strong enough to overcome this."

"I get to decide what recovery means to me."

"My story will continue."

"How it is today is not how it will always be."



*"The most powerful  
thing anyone can  
say to us is what  
we say to  
ourselves."*

CHRISTINE D'ERCOLE

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## **FURTHER LEARNING**

### **Podcasts**

[Podcast | Jessica Raymond's Story | Recovery Warriors](#)

[Eating disorders – Episodes – AnthroDish](#)

### **TED Talks**

["What if" I Actually Recovered? | Rebecca Leung | TEDxYouth@AISHK - YouTube](#)

[Sizeless Clothing & Eating Disorder Recovery | Erin Drischler & Jordan Tomb | TEDxPittsburghWomen - YouTube](#)

[Gaining Life: My Metamorphosis from Anorexia to Recovery | Kelsea McCready | TEDxMcMasterU - YouTube](#)

### **Reading**

[Redefining Recovery Helped Me Heal From My Eating Disorder \(buzzfeednews.com\)](#)

[Recovering Uncertainty: Exploring Eating Disorder Recovery in Context | SpringerLink](#)

[Managing & Coping with Feelings about Eating Disorders \(eatingdisorderhope.com\)](#)