

11 Strategies for Staying Sober While Traveling

Make local contacts and avoid old drinking and drugging buddies.

By [Ruben Castaneda](#) | Staff Writer Feb. 8, 2017, at 12:04 p.m.

Safeguarding your sobriety on the road

For [addicts and alcoholics in recovery](#), staying sober can be a matter of life and death. And maintaining one's sobriety can be particularly challenging while traveling. "Regardless of the reason for travel, being in a situation that disrupts the person in recovery from their normal schedule, their regular

support system and their daily regimen of recovery can be a trigger for relapse," says [Holly Daniels](#), the clinical outreach director at Sober College, which has substance abuse facilities for young adults in San Diego and Woodland Hills, California. To help people in recovery maintain their sobriety while traveling, [addiction and recovery experts](#) suggest these strategies:



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Plan ahead.

Before you leave, look up the schedule of support group meetings in the town or city you're heading to, and try to work meetings into your schedule, advises [Anita Gadhia-Smith](#), a psychotherapist who practices in the District of Columbia and Bethesda, Maryland. She knows about the [challenges faced by](#)

[alcoholics](#) and addicts firsthand; Gadhia-Smith is the author of the memoir "From Addiction to Recovery: A Therapist's Personal Journey." Attending [support group meetings](#) is a crucial component of any addict's or alcoholic's recovery. "Try to go as soon as you can – it will set the tone for the rest of the trip," she says.



(Getty Images)

Make local contacts.

Before you go on your trip or shortly after you arrive, make contact with fellow [alcoholics or addicts](#) in recovery in the place you're visiting, and keep their phone numbers with you. You can call the local Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous office for names and numbers. Reaching out to fellow substance abusers in recovery helps you feel less lonely, a feeling that can lead someone to relapse, Gadhia-Smith says. Local people in recovery can also recommend nearby support group meetings and will typically lend their support by making time to meet for coffee or drive you to a meeting.



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Bring recovery literature or recordings.

Whether you're flying or traveling by bus, train or automobile, bring recovery-related books such as AA's "The Big Book," which describes the support group's 12-step program and includes personal stories of recovery. An audio version is available [on a free app](#). And you can download recordings of talks by [people in recovery](#), often delivered at conferences or seminars. For example, in the District of Columbia region, a man named Sandy Beach, who died in 2014, delivered legendary talks on sobriety to large crowds; these could be downloaded and listened to any time, anywhere.



(Getty Images)

Remember your HALT.

Pay attention to [HALT](#), and don't become too hungry, angry, lonely or tired, says [Anne Lewis](#), a clinical psychologist and licensed addictions counselor with [Indiana University Health](#). Any of these things, such as getting too hungry, could trigger a relapse, Lewis says.

"Pack snacks for longer trips if you're unsure of food stops, and

don't require yourself to stay up later to get somewhere faster," she says. "Give yourself a few moments to check in with your support group or sponsor and regroup emotionally."



(iStockphoto)

Stay in contact with your home network.

Even if you develop contacts in the place you're traveling to, it's important to maintain close contact with the [people in your support network](#) at home, including your AA or NA sponsor – the person who guides you through the recovery process, says [Beth Kane-Davidson](#), director of the Addiction Treatment Center at [Suburban Hospital](#) in Bethesda, Maryland. Through texts, emails and phone calls, it shouldn't be difficult to stay in touch with people who support your sobriety.



(Getty Images)

Have the booze removed.

If you're staying at a hotel with minibars in the rooms, call ahead and ask the hotel to clear out [the booze](#) before you arrive. "I've had dozens of patients who've done this," Gadhia-Smith says. Clearing your room of alcohol reduces the chances you'll drink impulsively. If you're staying at the home of a friend or relative who drinks, bring non-alcoholic beverages for yourself.



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Stay away from certain people and places.

Whether you drank hard liquor or used cocaine, [marijuana](#) or [opioids](#), being around people you once drank or used drugs with can be a relapse trigger. Places can also spark a relapse, so stay away from the local bar where you once met your drinking buddies or the park where you used to buy drugs.



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Keep to your routine.

As much as possible, adhere to your usual regimen. Try to get up and have breakfast and other meals at the usual time. If you pray or [meditate](#) in the morning, keep doing so. "Don't take a vacation from your recovery," Gadhia-Smith advises. Whether you're on a business trip or visiting friends or family, arrange your schedule so you don't have [huge chunks of idle time](#), which can lead you to compulsive behavior, but also aren't over-scheduled, which can be stressful and lead to a relapse.



(Getty Images)

Game out business meetings.

If your trip is business-related, don't feel you have to stay long at a [booze-soaked happy hour](#), reception or party. It's OK to go early and leave quickly. "You get the same credit for attending a social event if you're there for a few minutes or for two hours," 'Gadhia-Smith says. "Make sure you say hello to the people you need to greet and then leave."



(Getty Images)

Prepare for family drama.

Family visits can be fun but fraught with intense emotions that can lead a sober alcoholic or addict to relapse. The fact that you've stopped drinking and using drugs and made progress in your life doesn't mean your relatives have changed, even if they conducted an

intervention to get you into

treatment, Gadhia-Smith says. "If a situation is deteriorating, politely excuse yourself and come back later," she says. "Then, call someone in your recovery network. Making contact with a sane, calm voice can help restore you to emotional equilibrium."



(Getty Images)

In a pinch, turn to technology.

People in recovery sometimes feel like they need to get to a meeting if they're under an unusual amount of [stress](#) or haven't been to one in a while. If you feel you need to get to an AA or NA meeting but can't attend one in person because of scheduling conflicts, you can still join one wherever you are – by phone. You can go online and find 12-step support group meetings that you can call in to and join. You can also go online and [participate in chat rooms](#) for people in recovery.



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