

## The sign in the road

If you have just gone through depression, you may find yourself wishing you could forget that it ever happened. This is not a good idea.

What were the risk factors that contributed to your mood problem?

It was probably a combination of things. Some of them you couldn't control, and may never be able to control. But perhaps you have identified a few things about your lifestyle that contributed to the problem. Hang onto these insights and be watchful that you don't start sliding into your old habits.

Maybe you are a compulsive caregiver. When you are in a room of 10 people, you will give care and support to 9 of them: Everyone except yourself. You may have discovered that you need to start caring for the one person you have left out.

Maybe you work too much. You accept duty after duty, project after project, never delegating responsibility and never saying "no." Your work hours steadily expand, crowding out your social life, your family, everything other than the job. Perhaps you have learned that the most valuable workers are those who pace themselves, and that there is more to life than sitting at a desk.

Whatever your insights, recognize this: For all the pain it may have given you, that old way of living – that *road* – is familiar. Human beings like familiarity. We are attracted to it. So if you have recently chosen to travel a *new* road, realize that it will be tempting at times to go back to the old way. You may find yourself traveling that old road (working late, caring for the world, drinking too much, being passive) without meaning to do so.

You will need to put up a stop sign on that old road as a reminder to yourself. *"Stop! Remember where this road leads."* This is like the warning message you get with some computer programs when you are about to do something that can't be changed. *"Stop! Are you sure?"* When that sign comes up, you will become aware of what you are doing. Having caught yourself, you can choose again to take the new road.

When should this sign appear in your mind?

Maybe when you realize you haven't had an hour to yourself in a week. Maybe when you stay at work past seven p.m. more than two nights in a row. Maybe when you walk through the door of a bar. Maybe when you feel yourself falling for someone exactly like your abusive ex-partner. Maybe when you let an entire business meeting pass without contributing. It depends on the old pattern that you want to change.

Is there a certain aspect of your lifestyle (e.g., overwork, not enough exercise, bad relationship decisions, drinking too much) that contributed to problems for you? What is it?

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What would be a sign for you that you are sliding back into that pattern? Be specific. Examples: taking one drink, working past nine p.m., going a week without a night off.

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If you catch yourself doing this again, what would you like to tell yourself? *"You can't control everyone's life."* *"Remember where this led last time."*

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What would you like to do instead? Some examples: Call your support buddy, schedule an evening just for you, leave work at quitting time the next day.

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