

## Self Help for Substance Abuse

Over the last few months, we have talked about the signs and symptoms of substance use and mental health disorders, and that treatment is key. There are also self-help steps that can sustain recovery when dealing with life's challenges.

### Recovery Tip 1: Recognize and Manage Stress and Emotions

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- Learn how to manage stress and cope with unpleasant feelings without turning to alcohol or drugs. Many people turn to alcohol or drugs to cover up painful memories or emotions such as loneliness, depression, and anxiety.
- Stay connected with friends and family. Positive emotional connection to those around you is the quickest way to calm your nervous system. If you don't have anyone you feel close to, it's never too late to meet new people and develop meaningful friendships.
- Know your triggers and have an action plan. If certain people, places, or activities trigger a craving for drugs or alcohol, try to avoid them. When a person experiences stressful events or big life changes, it is important to have a plan in place to prevent a relapse. Who will you talk to? What do you need to do to avoid back-sliding into old habits?
- Follow your doctor's orders. Once you are sober and feeling better, you may think medication or treatment is no longer needed. However, stopping medication or treatment is a common reason for relapse. Always talk with your doctor before making any changes to your medication or treatment routine.
- Become or stay involved in a support group. Your chances of staying sober greatly improve if you are participating in therapy or a social support group like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.

### Recovery Tip 2: Make Healthy Lifestyle Changes

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- Exercise regularly. Exercise is a natural way to reduce stress, relieve anxiety, and improve moods and outlooks. To achieve the maximum benefit, aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise most days.
- Practice relaxation techniques. When practiced regularly, relaxation techniques - such as mindfulness meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, and deep breathing - can reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, and increase feelings of emotional well-being.
- Adopt healthy eating habits. Start the day right with breakfast, and continue with frequent small meals throughout the day. Going too long without eating leads to low blood sugar, which can make you feel stressed or anxious.
- Get enough sleep. Lack of sleep can increase stress, anxiety, and depression, so try to get 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep a night.
- Develop new activities that provide meaning and a sense of purpose. When you're doing things you find fulfilling, you'll feel better about yourself and substance use will hold less appeal.

To stay alcohol- or drug-free for the long-term, you'll need to build a new, meaningful life that leaves no room for substance use. Getting sober is just the beginning. Sustained recovery depends on learning healthier coping strategies and making better decisions when dealing with life's challenges.