

How to Recover from Drug or Alcohol Addiction and Achieve a
Balanced Lifestyle

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How does an addict or an alcoholic actually make the change in their life and become clean and sober?

What is the process that they have to go through? What triggers the change? What creates the moment of surrender?

And, how can family and friends of an addict or alcoholic push them closer to this point of surrender? How can they encourage the addict to take action to change their life?

If you are an addict or alcoholic, or you know one who is struggling to get clean and sober, then read on to find out some of the hard answers (hint: there are no easy shortcuts, but there is some hope!).

Let's take an in-depth look at the process of early recovery, and some possible suggestions that might help people out:

- * **Spiraling out of control**
- * **Hitting bottom**
- * **Motivation through pain**
- * **Becoming willing**
- * **The moment of surrender**
- * **Taking action**
- * **Following through**
- * **Finding the path**
- * **Creating a new life**
- * **I am an addict or an alcoholic. What should I do?**

Achieving balance in recovery:

- * **Key point: balance is not critical in very early recovery.**
- * **Balanced lifestyle meshes perfectly with the holistic approach to good health in recovery.**
- * **Maintaining balance helps to alleviate obsession, which can lead to unhappiness.**
- * **Striving for balance gives your life the variety you need to keep things interesting.**
- * **Achieving balance in recovery helps to protect you from the threat of relapse.**
- * **Having a balanced life gives you the ability to respond from a place of strength.**
- * **Attaining balance in recovery keeps exposing you to new concepts, so you are always learning.**
- * **Balance can help you to reduce stress by building in some down time to a hectic schedule.**
- * **Focusing on balance insures that you create discipline in your life.**
- * **The pursuit of a balanced lifestyle will help you to grow in many new directions.**

Spiraling out of control

This is the "point of no return," when things start to get really bad for the addict or alcoholic. In my opinion this is a mental shift. As someone who lived through the process of being addicted to drugs and alcohol, I can recall many moments of desperation where I felt trapped, and had convinced myself that the only solution for me was to continue to medicate with drugs and alcohol.

For one thing, this internal decision had to do with the "uniqueness" factor. I believed, as many addicts do, that I was unique in my complete and total love for getting high. I figured that other addicts and alcoholics who could sober up *must not be like me*, because they do not love drugs as much as I did. This was my reasoning, anyway, and a big part of why I continued to justify my using.

In speaking with others in recovery, I know that this feeling of being unique in our love for getting drunk/high is not unusual for an addict. This is a very common symptom of addiction. Unfortunately, simply telling the addict that they are NOT unique in their love of drugs does very little to actually change their mind about it. But it is still important to acknowledge "the unique factor" so that you can gain a better understanding of just how trapped the addict might be feeling.

Now when an addict is spiraling out of control, they will eventually have to acknowledge that their life is turning into a mess. This is because at some point, the consequences **become too large to ignore**. But don't be surprised if the addict sees little connection with their drug use, even in the face of heavy consequences! They might still be hanging on to excuses, and **blaming others** for the things that have become screwed up in their life. This of course is denial.

Further down the road, the addict may eventually have to acknowledge that it is, in fact, the drugs or the alcohol that is at the root of their problem. I have been at that point and *still not become willing to change*. This is **another level** of denial. To admit that the drugs are your problem, but still being too afraid to try sobriety. It is possible to be stuck in this phase as well.

For example, I knew I had reached a point where I could no longer control my drinking. I knew I was a real, true, full blown alcoholic. There was no more denying it. But I was still too scared (for a while) to do anything about it. I was stuck (in fear). I was too afraid to ask for help. Too afraid to go back to rehab.

Hitting bottom

When does an addict actually hit bottom?

It is actually sort of a mystery because it can only be observed in retrospect. Someone who finally surrendered to their disease of addiction can later look back and say "Yes, that was when I hit bottom right there."

Maybe it was yet another night spent in jail. Maybe it was getting busted for drugs and having the children taken away. There are a million different bottoms out there for different people, and obviously it is going to vary quite a bit.

One important thing to remember is that some people never reach their bottom, and they just keep using until they are dead. Had they stopped at some point, and said "Wow, I have really hit bottom this time. I should try living a different way," then they might still be around. It does happen.

So what is the key to helping a struggling addict recognize their bottom? Is it even possible to do so?

If you speak with people in recovery about what their bottom was like, you start to get a better picture of what to expect. About half the people who sobered up will tell you that they had an actual event in which they recognized their bottom. For example, they were sitting in jail after another DUI. Or they ruined a family gathering because they were so intoxicated. Some event occurred that made them realize that they had to make a change.

But it is significant to point out that **the other half** of the people who sobered up and finally "got" recovery did not have any such event to create this bottom for them. They might have had consequences throughout their addiction, but they did not have a major event or a major consequence push them into recovery.

So it can work both ways. But *a crisis event can be an opportunity* for some. Facing real consequences can wake some addicts up. But then again, it might not.

Pretty much any intervention, either formal or informal, is an attempt to convince an addict that they are at their bottom, and it is time to make a change. We will take a look at this in a moment.

Motivation through pain

You want to know the truth about what motivates a struggling addict or alcoholic to change? Go ask an expert who has been in Al-anon for several years.

"Pain is what motivates the addict," they will tell you. "When the pain of continuing to drink becomes greater than the pain of making a change, the addict will change."

I could see this equation working out in my own life, right before finally surrendering to my disease. I was lonely, and bored with my life, and I wanted the drugs and alcohol to make it fun and exciting for me--even if temporarily. So I bought some very strong liquor (151 proof) and proceeded to drink and use drugs.

Was I in pain? Not any physical pain, no. But I still had a strong need to medicate my emotions because I was battling loneliness at the time. And it wasn't working. The drugs and the booze were *not working*. They were not producing fun for me. I could not get to that "happy place." I knew that if I continued to drink the liquor, that I would eventually either black out, or pass

out, **but neither one of them was really what I wanted.** I wanted to be *happy*. And it just wasn't working.

What did it take for me to realize that it was no longer working? Why did I realize it *then*, at that moment, when I could have discovered this at an earlier point in time? I can speculate a few reasons:

1) I was temporarily lonely, and I was comfortable being in a (dysfunctional) relationship with someone who was on vacation with family for a few weeks.

2) I was depressed and isolated, and normally I was not isolated. This may have been enough to **push me over that "pain threshold."**

3) I was forced to look at myself, and examine my life for what it had become. **I could not blame others**, because the "others" were on vacation. I had no useful distraction from myself.

4) I was alone, and I had money, and even had a few friends around, and I thought: "I should be able to produce happiness in this situation. I should be able to feel good in this freedom." Of course I was miserable, and had plenty of strong drugs and alcohol, and yet I could not achieve anything like happiness.

So this was the state of being when I was forced to admit that I did not know how to live. **Using my best ideas about having fun, achieving happiness, and being content, I was still miserable.** And it was not for lack of resources. I had no one else to blame. **I was forced to admit that I had orchestrated my own misery.**

Becoming willing

The moment of surrender is when the addict becomes willing. Willing to do what?

Willing to *try something different*. Willing to go to rehab. Willing to try anything that sounds even remotely reasonable.

If there is a lot of hesitation at this point then the addict may not be truly ready to change. They may not have hit their bottom yet.

For example: "Oh, I am ready to change my life and quit drinking, but I'm not going to *that* particular treatment center."

Or "I'm willing to stop using drugs, but I can go to outpatient therapy to get help for this, rather than what *you* are suggesting."

Or "I do want to stop using drugs, but I am not going to *any* meetings or group therapy."

Of course all of these examples have that ring of classic denial to them. The fact is, 99 percent of the time, family and friends just want what is best for the addict, and 99 percent of the time, they have a better idea of "what's best" than the addict does.

If the addict in question is struggling against this collective wisdom, then it is a sure sign of denial. If they are not fully willing to engage in any reasonable request, then they are probably not yet ready to change.

You will know when the addict has become willing, because they will **become open** to any suggestion about getting them professional help. They will not be fighting the ideas about rehab, or meetings, or counseling, and so on.

The reason it is important to hit bottom first is so that the addict realizes that **their problems are of their own making**. If they do not have this level of humility, then they will not be open to suggestions about how to fix their life.

For an addict, willingness is saying: ***"I am completely out of control and I do not know how to live. Please help me."*** Anything less than that and they are hanging on to a shred of denial, and they are still fighting to control their addiction and their life. They must let go *absolutely* in order to find real change.

The moment of surrender

This is what Alcoholics Anonymous refers to as "the turning point." The addict **stops fighting** and something drops away from them. They cease to struggle. They come to realize that they do not want the future pain of using more drugs and alcohol. They have accepted the idea of change, and fear, and the unknown instead. They have suddenly become open to facing that fear, rather than to continue to endure more pain.

They see their addiction for what it really is, and how it is leading them nowhere. They admit that it is no longer fun to use drugs and to drink. **They accept that it will never be fun again.**

And they accept the idea that **they need help** in order to recover. That they must ask someone else for direction. They admit that they need instructions for how to live better.

Taking action

What actions produce success in recovery?

Is there a magic formula for success? Are there certain treatment centers that have substantially higher success rates?

Are there certain recovery programs that are better than others? Are religious based programs successful?

Can you say to an addict "Do this, and you will stay clean. Follow these directions, and you cannot fail."

Do any of these details really matter?

All good questions. To get the answers, we have to take a look at what actually works for people in recovery.

Imagine that you took this list of questions and asked them of 100 addicts and alcoholics who are already living in recovery. What do their answers tell us?

If you do this experiment you will find that **people find success through different programs, and through different recovery strategies.**

For example, there are some who find success in 12 step programs. But there are some who go see an individual therapist twice a week, and they have achieved recovery without using groups at all. And there are some people who have found success using religious based programs. And so on.

So it does not necessarily make sense to limit ourselves to one program, or one path in recovery. This flies in the face of all available evidence. To say that an addict *must* find recovery through *one* specific method, and cannot be allowed to explore alternatives, is too constricting.

However, the moment of surrender does not lend itself to choice. **An addict who is designing their own recovery program on their first day clean does not have good odds.** So it makes sense to get people into a program of some sort--any program--and let the details get sorted out later. Professional help of any sort is better than the addict trying to design their own recovery. The lesson here is to get help quickly without being too picky, especially if the addict is at the point of surrender and is willing.

Most of the addiction help out there is abstinence based. They spin you dry and sober you up and get you off drugs and then they try to teach you how to live without going back to your old ways. There are a million and one ways to try and teach people how to live sober, but **the process of early recovery remains fairly consistent.**

The way that alcoholics stay sober at 5 years of sobriety and later might differ quite a bit from person to person, but the way that they get clean and sober is going to be somewhat similar. In the beginning, we all had to stop using drugs and alcohol. We all had to find a way to put the bottle down. Early recovery is actually quite simple. Don't put drugs and alcohol into your body, one day at a time.

In other words, early recovery is pretty standard. Go to 100 different treatment centers, and you will see that the process of early recovery remains fairly consistent.

So then: ***What actions produce success in early recovery?***

Based on my own experience, and on my observations, it is not *what* you do in recovery that produces the results, but rather it is the *intensity*.

For example, going to rehab never worked for me. But going to **long term** rehab and really getting serious about recovery produced awesome results for me. In particular, I did the following:

- 1) Lived in long term rehab for 20 months.
- 2) Started networking heavily with others in recovery, and basically dropped all of my old using friends immediately.
- 3) Started pushing myself to grow as a person, both through the help of a professional therapist, and through a sponsor in recovery.
- 4) Completely immersed myself in recovery, and started seeking a spiritual path in my life.

Those were the basics for me in early recovery. Later on, I had to shift my strategy drastically in order to keep growing in my recovery.

But the key is to take action. I would go a step further and say that the key is to take **massive** action, especially if you are in very early recovery.

Don't just go to rehab or hit a 12 step meeting.....do these things with intensity. **Dedicate your life to recovery.** Quit your job for a while. Focus on learning how to live sober.

It is all about action. What are you actually going to do for your recovery? **Thoughts and intentions count for nothing.** All that matters are your actions.

The specifics will differ among addicts. Some might find success through church, some through therapy sessions, some through rehab, some through 12 step meetings, and so on.

The details are not the key. The details are not where the magic happens.

What is important is the **follow-through**. The **dedication**. The **commitment** to recovery. This is what I mean when I say "taking massive action."

If the addict tries to "incorporate a recovery program into their life," it will never work.

They have to live it. This is massive action. The addict must incorporate recovery into *every moment* of their life. And everything they do should become relevant to their recovery.

Recovery becomes their whole life, at least at first. Early recovery demands it.

Anything less seems to lead to relapse.

So, don't just take action. Take *massive* action.

Following through

How does the addict follow through in early recovery? This is a stumbling point for many, and plenty of addicts and alcoholics struggle to get to that point of living in "long term sobriety."

So what is the key to making this transition? How does an addict move past the stage of chronic relapse? How do they break out of their cycle?

To me the answer to this question is obvious: change.

The addict has to change in recovery. Of course, everyone knows that the struggling addict or alcoholic has to change in order to get clean and sober. But what most people do not realize is that the recovering addict or alcoholic has to change, *even while living in long term recovery*, if they are to remain clean and sober.

Why is this?

The reason that recovery demands change is because **getting** sober is nothing like **staying** sober. Having 30 days clean is nothing like having 3 years clean. And neither is anything like having 10 years clean.

When we first get clean, it is all we can do to hang on and make it through early recovery. We take support however we can get it. We tough it out and do what we can to make it to that one year mark.

But later on, this no longer works. Why? Because we are changing and growing in recovery. It becomes less about *support*, and more about *growth*. We start to become the person we were supposed to be, before we got diverted with drugs and alcohol. And **this transition demands a different approach** than what we used at 30 days clean.

Those who do not evolve and push themselves to grow in recovery end up relapsing. They refer to this as "complacency."

Again, the details are not what drives this problem. You can be in a 12 step program, or a religious based program, or some form of therapy, and fall into complacency. Or you can be in any of those programs and rise to the challenge and continue to grow in your recovery.

This is how the addict *follows through* after early recovery and transitions into long term sobriety. They start living the life they were really meant to live, using their unique talents and skills to reach out to others in different ways. They become the person they were meant to be. For the religiously inclined, they are now doing God's will, **allowing themselves to be used as an instrument of God, to do his work**. This might be volunteering in a homeless shelter, running a drug rehab, coaching troubled teens, or even rescuing animals. (Remember, the details don't matter so much.....it is the action behind them that is important).

Finding the path

How does an addict take a recovery program and make it their own? How do they come to explore their own spiritual path in recovery?

Go ask 50 addicts in recovery and you will get 50 different answers. And this is the beauty of recovery--that it is both powerful and flexible.

For example, I have a friend in recovery who is very involved with 12 step recovery and sponsorship. He has almost 10 years of sobriety and has definitely found a path in recovery that works for him.

I have another friend in recovery who is also approaching 10 years of continuous sobriety, and he has left the rooms of traditional recovery (long ago) and is now an active member of a church community. Again, this is a path that works for him.

And I have seen others who have found non-traditional paths in recovery. But the path can be "traditional" as well, and still work out great for a person. It is all about your passion and enthusiasm, and less about the details.

In my opinion, our path in recovery is dictated by **how our strengths and talents can best be used to serve the world**. If you are not yet living your best life, using your gifts to help others, then you have not yet **found the path**.

Creating a new life

What exactly does it mean to create a new life in recovery? How does the recovering addict find meaning and purpose, when all they have come to know is getting high?

This can vary from addict to addict, obviously. But the key is in the term "creating." The addict must shape a new life for themselves **with action**. It will not fall into their lap, just because they are not drinking and using drugs anymore.

Some addicts are literally discovering sober living as a brand new experience, because they started using drugs and alcohol at such a young age. For them, they have never known any kind of "normal life."

For other addicts, they may have experience in life when they were basically healthy and not addicted and living in chaos. So they may have more of a reference point to look back on, and this can help guide them in creating a new life.

But the bottom line is that the addict cannot just stop using drugs and then drift aimlessly through recovery. Without a purpose, without some concrete goals, without something to push themselves towards and to put their energy into, they will not be able to keep growing continuously. **Complacency is a lack of creative energy**. Coasting through recovery without pushing yourself to achieve anything of significance is a recipe for relapse.

The life of creation is a life of action. Building a new life for yourself takes a lot of energy and effort.

I am an addict or an alcoholic. What should I do?

This is an easy answer, but tough to execute on:

- 1) Ask for help.
- 2) Take action. Follow suggestions. Don't struggle against the help. Go with the flow.
- 3) Follow through with it.
- 4) Push yourself to grow.

If you are a struggling addict or alcoholic and you are ready to change, then it really does not matter much what you do or where you go for help or who you ask. None of the details are crucial, so long as you **ask for help and then take real action.**

On the other hand, say that you are still hanging on to a piece of denial. You know you have a problem, but fear is holding you back from taking the plunge into sobriety. You do not fully accept any recovery solutions. "Meetings are not for me," you might argue.

If you are at this place (denial), then *nothing* will help you. No program will help you, no recovery strategy, no wisdom, no medication, no nothing. **You are in denial and nothing can help you.** You will continue to use drugs and alcohol until you can get past that last bit of denial and accept the fact that you can no longer be happy using drugs and alcohol. No real change can happen until you decide: "It's over." Time to break down, ask for help, and find a new path in life.

Only then can you start an awesome new life in recovery.

When I was in short term treatment for alcoholism and drug addiction, there was a lecture at the rehab center I attended about balanced lifestyle. At the time, I thought that this was sort of irrelevant, and I did not really see how it would help me to stay clean and sober in recovery.

Almost 10 years later, and balance is now one of the most important concepts in my life today.

Why?

Because as I stayed clean and sober, my life slowly become more complicated, and full. Relationships formed. I started working, went back to school, started a part time business, and so on. Life fills up with stuff in recovery. You experience new things, learn new things, and thus start accumulating stuff. Physical stuff, new relationships, and new responsibilities.

As you grow, and as your life gets better and better in recovery, the need for balance becomes more and more important. Let's take a closer look at the concept of balance and how it relates to our recovery:

Key point: balance is NOT critical in very early recovery.

I mentioned above that I had a lecture about balanced lifestyle in short term drug rehab, and I thought that it was irrelevant and out of place.

I still think that, actually.

So what is the deal? The deal is that balance is not really critical in *early* recovery, because that is when you need focus. You need to practically obsess on recovery concepts and support. You need strong willingness and dedication to staying clean and sober, at the exclusion of almost everything else. This has very little to do with balance.

Early recovery is **not** about balance. Early recovery is about doing whatever it takes to maintain sobriety. It is so tough to get through early recovery that a laser focus and raw, single-minded determination is more valuable than having balance in your life.

Early recovery requires the opposite of balance. You do not want to spread yourself thin in early recovery; instead, you want to go overboard in dedicating your life to sobriety.

I have already written a bit about [transition in recovery](#). Transition is an important concept because what got you clean and sober will not keep you clean and sober.

Transition is important because the things that keep you clean and sober at 90 days are not going to work for you at all when you have 2 years in. And none of that stuff will likely help you when you are at 8 years sober.

Why is this the case?

Because we grow and learn and evolve in recovery. Especially during the first year, our path in recovery is ever changing. For example, I lived in a treatment center for the first 20 months of my recovery. I did certain things in order to work on my recovery. Now, almost ten years later, my focus has shifted completely and my strategy for remaining sober is completely different. We change and grow in recovery, so our strategy for remaining sober must evolve as well.

Living in long term rehab gave me incredible focus in early recovery. Today, my life can better be described in terms of balance, rather than being laser focused. Focus was important in my early recovery, but today, it pays me greater benefit to consider the idea of balance, and make sure that I am keeping things in healthy perspective. If one area of my life gets too much focus, then I can easily become obsessed, less happy, and potentially less healthy as well.

The idea of balance is not critical in *early* recovery. It becomes progressively more important the longer you stay clean and sober. It is hugely important in long term recovery.

Balanced lifestyle meshes perfectly with the holistic approach to good health in recovery.

One of the strongest strategies in recovery from addiction or alcoholism is one that is *holistic*.

That simply means that a person needs to focus on personal growth in all areas of their life, treating the "whole" person rather than just one part (like the spiritual aspect, for example).

So an holistic approach in recovery might include:

- * The search for spiritual growth.
- * Exercise on a regular basis.
- * Healthy nutrition.
- * Quitting smoking or other bad habits.
- * Seeking emotional balance.
- * Nurturing healthy relationships and eliminating toxic ones.
- * The search for more knowledge and more education on an ongoing basis.

And so on. Anyone who is actively pursuing growth in their life in several of these areas is really pursuing an holistic recovery strategy. Doing so becomes extremely powerful, because each one of these areas of growth can have a positive impact on your ability to stay clean and sober.

Many recovery programs limit themselves to spiritual growth alone. But realize how much more powerful and successful those in recovery will be when they refuse to limit themselves to growth in just one area. For example, some people stay clean and sober through a program of rigorous exercise. So imagine how helpful it would be to those using other strategies to incorporate vigorous exercise into their lives. If it works well for *some* then it should be at least helpful for others, as a general rule.

The other key here is that you may discover **which recovery strategies are most helpful to you** through your search for balance and holistic growth. For example, some people might never discover how important a role nutrition plays for how they feel on a regular basis, until they experiment with it. On the other hand, others might not even notice a difference when they switch up their diet. So the key is that an holistic approach will help you to explore what really works for you (and what does not) in terms of staying clean and sober.

A balanced lifestyle is really a push for holistic health. If you are seeking balance, then you would not neglect important areas of your life, such as your physical health, your emotional state, or your spiritual growth. Instead, in the search for real balance, the holistic approach should develop naturally as you strive to learn and to grow in *all areas* of your life.

Maintaining balance helps to alleviate obsession, which can lead to unhappiness.

What is the opposite of balance?

In a positive sense, extreme focus. If you are focused on just staying clean and sober, for example, then that might be a good thing.

In a negative sense, **obsession** might be a better term for a negative lack of balance. If you are obsessing over something, and this detracts from your overall quality of life, then obviously you want to recognize that and seek to restore balance.

What are some examples?

* **Work** - some people become obsessed with their work, to an unhealthy degree. They may lose themselves in their work, put in long hours, or use it as a way to avoid looking at themselves and their issues. Some people temporarily "conquer" their addiction by throwing themselves into their work, such that they do not have time to indulge their drug of choice. This is almost never the healthy answer though and too much work can certainly end up being a bad thing.

* **Relationships** - Emotional dependency is not a healthy thing, and can mask other problems that might be being covered up by an obsessive relationship. For example, some people get into recovery and find that meeting a significant other gives them an emotional boost that makes it seem easy to stay clean and sober in the short term. The problem is that the "high" from the new relationship does not last, and real recovery skills still need to be built. Obsessing over another person is still an obsession, and is usually an unhealthy one. That said, real relationships can still form in recovery, but a healthy balance will always be a priority.

* **Support systems** - yes, even recovery strategies can become a dependency of sorts if you overdo it, and I believe that this happens to some people in various recovery groups. You can become obsessed with your recovery solution (such as religion, 12 step programs, or others) and basically lose the forest for the trees. Remember that **the real goal of recovery is a healthy life**. Some people lose sight of that because they become obsessed with their solution.

A recovery program is not the ultimate point of your life. Healthy, purposeful living is the point of your life. Don't confuse the two. If you are obsessed with a recovery program, it is time to take a step back and seek some balance.

Regardless of what you become obsessed with in recovery, it is not going to be healthy in the long run when you compare it to the idea of balance and holistic health. As such, one thing you might do is to try and **have a sharp awareness about any obsessions that might be developing** in your life. When you see one, it is a red flag to take a step back and consider how balanced your life is right now.

Obsession almost always leads to stress and general unhappiness. Balance restores harmony and keeps you content in life.

Striving for balance gives your life the variety you need to keep things interesting.

Is there such a thing as burn out in recovery? You bet.

Some people get involved with a recovery program such as the twelve step program, but they end up getting burned out with it, and some may even relapse because of it.

Again, your recovery solution really should be a balanced life of holistic health, not some program that simply points you towards a potential solution. This could include a 12 step program of course, but the key is to push yourself toward holistic growth beyond what is offered in traditional programs (just spiritual growth).

Your life needs balance and variety in order to be sustainable. If you rely too heavily on a 12 step program (or any other recovery program), then you run the risk of living far too narrow a recovery solution, one that does not have the flexibility to respond to all of life's challenges.

This is not to say that a 12 step program is not effective for recovery. It most certainly is, and can work well for certain people. The problem comes in when the program becomes the only thing in your life, to the detriment of other endeavors and growth experiences outside of traditional recovery.

For example, take the person who is actively involved in AA, but also has an active life in their church, exercises on a regular basis, works at a job that has some meaning for them, and works hard at maintaining emotional stability through therapy and counseling. Such a person has a bit of balance in their life, and they also have some balance in their approach to recovery. This is strong because it is sustainable over time, the therapy and counseling and church can help give perspective and new information that might not come to the person through AA alone.

This is not to say that everyone in AA should run out and join a church and seek counseling. There are many potential paths and various strategies in recovery. The key is not that you choose the right strategies, but only that you find the ones that work well for you, and achieve enough balance in your life that you are not missing the bigger picture.

If you choose a recovery program and become so focused on it that you are not living a balanced life of growth, then it is time to take a step back and reevaluate. Holistic health should be the long term goal, and **balance should be the guiding principle that leads you there**. Specific recovery programs are just tools, **they only point to the solution; they are not the solution itself**.

Achieving balance in recovery helps to protect you from the threat of relapse.

When you achieve balance in long term recovery you become more protected from the threat of relapse.

How?

There are a couple of ways that balance helps to protect you from relapse:

* You can react quicker to various life emergencies when you live a balanced lifestyle. No emergency will prove too difficult if you have a stable recovery that is rooted in holistic health. For example, say you depend heavily on therapy for your recovery, but then suddenly have no means of income. Or, say you rely heavily on 12 step meetings and then suddenly you have to move to a remote location, and can't find them quickly. Having balance in recovery means you are not depending on this stuff that could potentially change at the drop of a hat.

* Balance brings a certain amount of protection with it. Relapse can creep in from many directions. Living a life of balance helps to keep you protected from potential hazards, such as getting hooked on pain medication, or being completely devastated due to a failed relationship.

When you have a balanced life in place, none of these typical triggers will have as much impact on you, because you have other important areas in your life to help offset the disruption. In other words, when you have balance in your life, no single aspect of your life can completely derail you, because the other aspects are all strong as well.

- * Balance protects against obsessions, which can easily lead to relapse.
- * Balance reduces your overall stress level, reducing the risk of relapse.
- * Achieving balance helps teach you the level of discipline that is necessary to pursue a successful recovery.
- * Pursuing balance keeps you in learning mode, as you push yourself to grow in new areas, thus helping you to avoid complacency.
- * Pursuing balance forces you to raise your level of self awareness, a huge key in ongoing success in recovery.

Having a balanced life gives you the ability to respond from a place of strength.

Recently I examined the idea that [living a passive life](#) was always leading a person to *react* to situations, instead of *responding* from a place of real strength.

What is the difference?

One difference has to do with how balanced the person is....emotionally, and otherwise.

If your life is in a state of chaos, if your relationships are a mess, if you are deep in debt and not earning much income, if you are out of shape and often sick and feeling lousy all the time....these are the kinds of conditions that lead to more poor decisions. The chaos and negativity can become a cycle.

On the other hand, if you have worked hard in your life to take positive action and achieve some real balance, then there are very few situations which could really throw you for a loop. If you are really working hard to grow on a holistic path, then really there is nothing so great that it would knock you down so far as to even consider relapsing.

Here are some examples of how balance allows you to respond with strength to new situations in your life:

- * If you suffer an illness or injury, having balance allows you to better cope with it. For example, strong spirituality, healthy relationships, or a vigorous exercise routine might all play a vital role in helping you to deal with an unexpected illness.
- * If your spiritual development takes a back seat role for a while, having other strong holistic themes in your life can help to compensate for that and help you to correct course. For example,

if you are in the habit of good nutrition, helping others in recovery, or regular exercise, then all of these things can and do push you back to a more spiritual path. So you can protect yourself from spiritual relapse by expanding your spirituality in a way.

* If you rely heavily on 12 step meetings for your sobriety, seeking balance and finding new ways to grow and learn can help you to achieve balance and strength. Some people become dependent on meetings in order to stay clean. This misses the point of recovery a bit, and could use some healthy balance to even things out. Again, the pursuit of holistic health should give you enough power, strength, and positive vibes that you would not entirely dependent on meetings in order to maintain sobriety. There is nothing wrong with going to meetings....but depending on them too much shows you that there is a need for balance.

* When you seek balance over the long term in recovery, you become better able to respond to new crisis situations. This is simply due to learning over time with an emphasis on seeking new knowledge and attempting to be well rounded. You become more versatile as a human being when you push yourself to keep learning and to stay balanced. Which brings us to our next point....

Attaining balance in recovery keeps exposing you to new concepts, so you are always learning.

When I first got clean and sober in recovery, I kept hearing it over and over again: "The solution is spiritual."

So for the first few years of my recovery, I focused on deepening my spiritual connection. Only the thing is, I did this in ways that I thought were "spiritual."

In other words, I prayed, I meditated, and I read books about spirituality, and I studied the religion that I was raised on, and so on.

Now there was nothing necessarily wrong with all this, only that it was *a limited way to look at spirituality*.

At some point, my sponsor in recovery urged me to go back to work. And to go back to school. And to start exercising.

I thought the guy was nuts, to be honest. What did this stuff have to do with spirituality, and with staying clean and sober? I needed to focus on having a spiritual experience, or so I thought.

Well it turns out that all of that stuff that my sponsor was pushing me to do was all part of achieving balance, and it was all part of a huge learning experience.

So I started exercising regularly. This involved a huge amount of learning (and it is still going on today).

I also went back to school. Obviously, more learning.

And I got a job, then later I took on a more challenging job. More learning and growth experiences.

If you take an honest look at your life, you will always be able to find something you should work on. Some new direction for growth. Something you may have neglected or pushed to the side for a while.

The search for balance leads you to more learning. If you strive for balance in your life then you will always be learning new things, and discovering new truths about yourself.

This is a very powerful way to live because it involves constant self analysis. You don't have to beat yourself up or be overly critical, but you should still push yourself a bit to keep achieving personal growth.

Balance becomes the key concept for deciding your next direction. When you ask "How should I grow in my life? What should I be working on next?" the answer to this is going to be determined by taking stock in your life, and seeing what areas are lacking or need work.

For example, at one point fairly early in my own journey I was doing well in many aspects, but physically I was doing nothing. No exercise at all. This was a huge opportunity for me, and many others saw it first and suggested it. Eventually, I *gave in* and started exercising. I stuck with it long enough and now it is a real gift, a natural high all unto itself that I would never dream of going without.

Another example of mine was with education. I was working, being productive, and staying clean in recovery. Others saw potential and said "why don't you go back to school and finish up your degree?" My life was out of balance, because I was not being challenged enough, and was wasting potential. Again, others saw this before I did. (hint: take suggestions from those you trust!)

In each case, the search for balance helps point toward the next learning experience.

Another way to find an opportunity for more learning is to look at your fears, and then face them. There is no learning experience that is more valuable than to do this. There is no growth that you could make that is more significant than to face your fears and conquer them. It is hard, it is uncomfortable, and I personally don't like doing it. But when I get gutsy and face one of my fears head-on, the results are always worth it. Always. It is the quickest way to restore balance in your life and learn something new about yourself.

Balance can help you to reduce stress by building in some down time to a hectic schedule.

Sometimes the holistic growth thing can seem to get out of hand. If you are constantly trying to improve nearly every aspect of your life, how do you find time to relax and just enjoy your new life?

Balance is the key. Sometimes I have become far too wrapped up in my work and my business, and at some point it starts to affect me negatively. What typically happens then is that my family will encourage me to go on a vacation with them, and doing this taught me the importance of work/life balance.

Some people strive to have this sort of balance on a day to day basis. Others may do just fine with the occasional vacation or scheduled family time. The point is that you have to find a path that works for you. I am still finding my own path in this regard, I am far from having perfected it.

If you are just stuck on pushing yourself as hard as possible for personal growth then you run the risk of becoming obsessed. Exploring the idea of balance will help to reduce this risk by forcing you to examine the aspects of your life that could introduce some healthy stress reduction. This might be things such as:

- * Meditation.
- * Exploring your spirituality.
- * Exercise.
- * Helping others.

And so on. These are the sorts of things that can help to "slow you down" and help keep your life in perspective. It is not all about personal growth and achievement, all the time. If you do not do the things that allow you to reflect, then you will never really enjoy the progress you are making.

Balance helps to introduce these sorts of activities that allow you to reflect and actually enjoy your recovery.

Focusing on balance insures that you create discipline in your life.

How does the search for balance create discipline in your life?

First of all, **it takes discipline just to maintain the awareness needed to be able to think about a balanced lifestyle.**

You have to take a step back and view your life objectively (as much as you can anyway), and really try to take stock of what you need to work on.

Not only that, but you have to keep doing this on a continuous basis, so that you continue to learn and grow in your recovery.

Just maintaining this awareness about yourself takes a certain level of discipline. The only way to build it up is to commit yourself to become a better person, and then take positive action.

Second, **not everything that you try to achieve in your path of personal growth is going to be fun.** Some of it will probably be grueling hard work. And that is fine, there will be plenty of fun stuff too to balance it all out.

But understand that there will be some hard stuff, and some scary stuff, that you will be reluctant to do in your recovery. You must do it. You must push past the fear and create your own momentum through taking positive action. This creates discipline. When you do the things that are hard for you to do, and get positive long term results from it, then you are definitely on a path of real growth.

If you say that you are going to commit to a life of holistic growth and balance, but then you fail to do it, then you lack discipline. However, if you push yourself to follow through with this goal and **start achieving small victories in different areas of your life**, then you are building the discipline that is necessary to enjoy long term growth in recovery.

With discipline comes momentum, and confidence. Continue to take positive action and your success in life will build on itself. If you keep balance and holistic health as your guiding principles for personal growth, your stability in recovery will only increase as your life gets better and better.

The pursuit of a balanced lifestyle will help you to grow in many new directions.

The bottom line is that if you seek balance in your life and keep striving for holistic growth, then you will maintain success in recovery as you grow in new directions.

If you keep the concept of "balance" in the back of your mind as a guiding principle, you will be sure that **you always looking to improve the weak areas in your life**, which will help you tremendously. Most people prefer to minimize their weaknesses and this holds them back from making massive personal growth. When you seek balance you end up targeting your weakest areas (or areas in which you have been idle) and this can create a large amount of personal growth very quickly. If you make large gains in your weakest area then this makes a huge difference in your overall life.

Attack a weakness in your life and restore balance. Experience growth. Rinse and repeat. **Stop using "acceptance of self" as an excuse for inaction.**

Push yourself to achieve balance and you will be pushing yourself to grow in the areas that you most need it.

Life doesn't get much better than that!

Do you have balance in your life today? What do you need to work on most to restore balance?

Visit www.spiritualriver.com for more free ebooks and materials. Thanks!

These are all books that I have read and used to great effect on my journey in recovery. If you found the information here helpful at all, then you would probably benefit from reading some of these books as well.

[Codependent No More](#) by Melody Beattie - The definitive guide to read if you are the friend, family member, or loved one of someone who is struggling with addiction or alcoholism.

[Stage II Recovery](#) by Earnie Larsen - Talks about the idea that we can continue to grow in our recovery after we have mastered the basics of staying clean and sober.

[Creative Recovery: A Complete Addiction Treatment Program That Uses Your Natural Creativity](#) by Eric Maisel - this book does not align perfectly with my own ideas about creative recovery, but it is pretty close, and offers a unique alternative to 12 step based approaches.

[The Zen of Recovery](#) by Mel Ash - Awesome book if you are the least bit intrigued by zen buddhism.

[The Tao of Sobriety: Helping You to Recover from Alcohol and Drug Addiction](#) by David Gregson - Great book if you are interested in Taoism and you are in recovery.

[Conversations With God](#) by Neale Donald Walsch - an excellent resource if you struggle with the higher power concept in any way.

[The Prayer of Jabez](#) by Bruce Wilkinson - One of the best books out there for Christians to read if they are interested in taking action and getting results. Really inspiring, short read.

[The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment](#) by Eckhart Tolle - This book introduced me to the idea that I was not my mind. Very, very powerful. A must read.

[Personal Development for Smart People: The Conscious Pursuit of Personal Growth](#) by Steve Pavlina - Extremely practical and inspiring. No fluff or filler, very actionable book.