

An Addiction Program Guide for Rehabs and Treatment Centers

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This is an action guide for how to actually get and stay clean and sober. The goal is always abstinence. Moderation is not even considered here.

This is a practical guide for anyone in recovery from addiction or alcoholism. The ideas in this guide can work fine alongside of a 12 step program, but the 12 steps are not an absolute necessity for success. There are a number of different recovery strategies given here and if you honestly test them out in your life then you should find something that works for you.

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Regardless of where you are in your recovery journey you can benefit from this guide. All of this is practical advice that has been field tested in the real world. It is separated by category and focuses heavily on action items. You know, stuff you can actually *do* in order to get sober and remain that way.

We don't differentiate much between addiction and alcoholism. Alcohol and drugs are one and the same. Alcohol is just another drug. So don't be put off by the word sober if you are a drug addict, or the phrase "getting clean" if you happen to be a drunk. It is all the same stuff once you start living in recovery.

Again, feel free to use this guide for your treatment center, use it for your recovery group, or whatever. It is basically un-copyrighted. Use it however you please. The author (me) gives you full permission to do so. Share it with others!

This resource guide answers the question: **What can you actually do in order to become—and stay—clean and sober?**

There are a lot of useful suggestions in this guide for specific actions you can take in recovery. There are also some strategic tips for how to best manage your life in recovery. Let's get right to it.

Information overload in early recovery

You should almost always be asking yourself on a daily basis: "What should I be doing for my recovery right now, today?"

In other words: "**What action should I take next?**"

Now if you go to a 12 step meeting and ask for advice about what you should be doing for your recovery, you will get a whole bunch of different answers. People will recommend things that worked for them, and they will also try to assess your situation and give you the advice that they believe will actually help you.

There are 2 important **filters** that you need to use when deciding what you should be focusing on in your recovery:

1) Where you are at in terms of your recovery (how stable your recovery is, how confident you are in your new life, how positive your attitude is, etc.).

2) What actually works for you and helps you to stay sober, and what does not. (Some people may suggest things that don't really do much for you in terms of staying clean, even though those things may help other people).

So you need to figure out what to work on next in your recovery based on where you are at and what works well for you. If you ignore either of these filters then you are not going to be living your best life in recovery.

For example, if you are in very early recovery, then going to a 12 step meeting or attending a rehab center may be your best course of action. However, if you have several years of recovery under your belt, then going to a meeting today might actually be a poor use of your time. You might do better to reach out and help another addict directly, or spend valuable time with friends or family. So it can depend on **where you are at** in your journey. Note that the suggested actions in this guide follow a basic order from early recovery to long term sobriety. In other words, the first few suggestions are well suited for early recovery, and the later suggestions make more sense for long term recovery. There is a difference, and you should act accordingly!

As another example, say that you have sought help in a treatment center and they recommend outpatient counseling. You attend a few groups and realize that it does nothing for you, while the outside 12 step meetings seem to really help you out a lot. Figure out what works for you and then do it. If you are content and growing in your recovery then you are a success. Do what works. Testing is key.

Relapse is the strongest measure of failure. Many people in recovery try to dance around that idea and twist it somehow. Never lose sight of it though: **relapse is the ultimate negative outcome** (eclipsed only by death). You do not want to die and you do not want to relapse. Those should be your 2 strongest drives. Everything positive that you do in recovery should flow from that. Yes, you want a better life for yourself in recovery. Yes, you want to do positive things. But your guiding principle should be absolute recoil and horror at the idea of relapse. If you do not keep this at the forefront of your mind then you are setting yourself up for failure.

With that said, do whatever it takes to avoid relapse. It is your responsibility to figure out what works for you in recovery. No one else has to answer for your success or failure. If you relapse then that is on you. If you relapse then it means that you did not seek out the help that you needed to stay sober. If you relapse then that is a measure of the actions that you failed to take. We could summarize the formula as such:

Relapse = a lack of positive action.

If you relapse then it is simply because *you did not act*. You did not do the things that you needed to do in order to stay sober. The responsibility falls only on your shoulders. It is up to you to test different things and find what works for you.

This guide is a series of **actions**, of suggestions. You try different things to help you in your recovery and you stick with what works. This is a testing process. If you are not open to trying new things then you will relapse. If you are not open to various recovery solutions then you are limiting yourself.

So when you encounter "information overload" in recovery, your job is to deal with it as best you can, and test things out for yourself. This is your task and you cannot avoid it. Try new things in recovery and find the path that keeps you clean and sober. Test, test, test. Go to 90 in 90, see if that helps. Go to counseling, see if that helps. If you are not willing to try different stuff then you are not ready to recover yet.

Recovery is a learning process. You are learning how to live sober. This takes time, and it takes experimentation. You have to feel your way into this new life. You have to try some new ideas on. Be open to that process.

OK. Let's get to the action. What can you do in order to recover? How can you achieve sobriety?

Your first action in recovery: Make an internal decision to create a zero tolerance relapse policy

I often feel like this idea is never properly addressed in most recovery programs. They start right in on finding a higher power and relying on them and so on, but they never really address the idea of "Hey, you cannot use drugs or alcohol NO MATTER WHAT."

If you don't get that, all is lost.

So the number one action you have to take in recovery is to get that straight in your head: **That you cannot use drugs or alcohol today, period. No matter what.**

This is number one. This is priority number one. This has to come first, before anything and everything else. Because without this, everything else in your life will crumble.

So you are making an agreement with yourself, in your mind. You are agreeing that you will not use drugs or alcohol, period. I like to think of such an agreement as a **zero tolerance policy**.

In other words, you are going to have zero tolerance for drug or alcohol use in your life.

In fact, you should think of the idea of relapse as putting your hand in a hot flame, or touching a red-hot stove. Your mind should recoil at the thought of using drugs or alcohol.

If you are not at this particular mindset, then you need to find a way to get there.

Ask yourself: "Can I make a decision to swear off drugs and alcohol for today no matter what?" That I will not use under any circumstances, no matter what life throws at me, no matter what happens in my life? Can you swear off the possibility of relapse for today and honestly stick to it?

If so, then that is the thought that you must keep in your mind. Or rather, that is the *feeling* that you have to remember and keep close to your heart. You must vehemently oppose the idea of relapse with all of your being. Hang on to this feeling and keep it as your number one priority in life. Stay *desperate* to maintain sobriety.

This is the most important action step in recovery. It is the conviction to stay clean and sober, no matter what. This is your guiding force in recovery.

If you can take this action and make a zero tolerance policy with yourself, then it means you have fully surrendered and you are willing to do what it takes to stay clean and sober. If you cannot make this pact with yourself yet, then you probably have not yet surrendered. More on surrender later. For now, just realize that your number one priority in recovery always has to be abstinence from drugs and alcohol. That is number one. If you get that, and get it well, then the rest of this stuff can unfold however it wants, and your life will be so much better.

Zero tolerance policy. Tell yourself: "I am not using drugs or alcohol today, no matter what." **That is your mantra, your highest truth, your ultimate goal.** That stays number one. Don't ever waver from that.

Massive Action is the key to early recovery

So your first action in recovery is to make a zero tolerance policy with yourself: "I am not going to use drugs or alcohol no matter what today".....so what happens after that?

After that, your goal in life is to *deal with that decision*. How do you cope with the stress of everyday living without saying "screw it" and relapsing anyway, even in spite of your decision to not use drugs or alcohol. How do you deal with life now that you are deciding to remain clean and sober?

The answer starts with an idea called **massive action**.

You see, overcoming an addiction is NOT a little thing. It is a *big* thing. Probably the biggest thing you have ever done. Ever.

The idea that you can recover from addiction with a minimal effort is what throws people off. All our lives, we have seen that putting in a small effort usually gives us decent results.

Recovery does NOT work that way. Putting in a small or even medium effort into your recovery will NOT give you good results. At all. You will relapse.

No, the only way to succeed in recovery is to take *massive action*. You can't just "sort of" work a recovery program. You have to dive in with everything you have and completely dedicate your life to recovery. That is the only way it will work. Ever.

You can prove this to yourself: go to an AA or NA meeting and ask anyone with multiple years of clean time how hard they had to work for their recovery in the first year. Ask them if it was the hardest thing they ever had to do. EVERY single one of them will say "Yes, my early time in recovery was absolutely the hardest thing I have ever done in my life." Period. I know this is true because I have done this, and literally asked many people in recovery. They have all agreed that it took massive action, massive dedication, and a total commitment in order for them to stay clean and sober in early recovery. They all agree that it was probably the hardest thing they have ever done.

So, *learn from this*. Do not underestimate the task at hand. **You have to try harder at early recovery than you have ever tried in your life to do anything!** Got that? This is a more difficult task than you have ever encountered!

Don't be discouraged by this. Because of the heavy price of recovery, guess what? **It's also the greatest reward you have ever experienced.** Things tend to balance that way. Put in more effort, get out more reward. But understand the key is this: to stay clean and sober, you have to put in a *massive* effort. Anything less will result in relapse.

So what, you might be asking, constitutes massive action?

Here are some **examples**:

- * Living in a long term treatment center.
- * Completely immersing yourself in a recovery program (such as AA or NA).
- * Working hard with a therapist, counselor, or sponsor and actually taking suggestions from them and acting on them every single day.
- * Dedicating your life to recovery and spending every waking moment in conscious growth, working to better your life, and working to help others in recovery.

As you can see it is not so much about *what* you do but more about the *passion* with which you do it.

Volume matters. Volume is passion.

If you go to AA meetings and expect that to keep you sober, then don't just go to a few each week. Go to a few each *day*. And start taking suggestions from those meetings and *applying* them in your life. Don't just show up and talk a good game. They speak of a spiritual experience through the steps. **Go attain that.** Find someone to help get you there if this is the path you want. Find the next action and take it. Seek the next action with *desperation*.

Massive action does not have to happen within a program, **but that often makes it easier to know what to do.** The key is that you are not just sitting back, expecting recovery to happen. **You have to create it**, through positive action. If you lack energy then you will not have the passion to make your life into a success in recovery.

Using our drug of choice is a shortcut to passion (that screws us up in the end). Taking massive action is your key to finding passion in your life again. It is your responsibility to find passion in your life and take positive action every day. If you don't do these things then you will not attain the best life for yourself in recovery.

When you do find this passion in your life, massive action will be part of it.

Find positive actions that help your recovery, and then do them. A lot.

Take action.

Don't expect results without taking action.

Don't expect to stay sober **unless you are passionate** about being sober.

In order to achieve that kind of passion, you need to take action. *Massive* action.

Wrong mindset: Figuring out how to do the least amount possible and stay sober. This is the opposite of taking massive action. I see this attitude over and over again at the treatment center that I work at, and I just want to grab the person by the shoulders and shake them up and say "Hey, do you really think you have a chance at beating your addiction if you just keep trying to do the bare minimum to stay clean?"

Think about it: even many addicts and alcoholics who **are** serious about staying clean and sober end up relapsing. Even many of those who are actually putting forth some real effort end up relapsing. Even some of those who have a positive attitude toward recovery end up relapsing. So what do you think will happen if you have a bad attitude, or are trying to just do the bare minimum in recovery? **You don't have a chance.** It takes massive action. You have to go way, way, way far in the other direction...of diving in headfirst into recovery and **embracing it with everything you have got.** This is the only path to success. Massive action. Total commitment. Go big or go home. Nothing less will work. I promise.

Focus on 3 things in recovery: Networking with others, personal growth, and caring for yourself

There are 3 main ideas in any successful recovery. These are like "core principles." It would be really hard to work ANY recovery program without using these concepts.

Let's break them down and take a closer look at each one:

- * Caring for self
- * Networking with others
- * Personal growth

Caring for self

Caring for yourself is one pillar of recovery. If you are on the right path then you will automatically start taking better care of yourself.

In active addiction, the tendency is to treat our bodies poorly. Abusing drugs and alcohol tends to lead us in the direction of poor health. Not only that, but it can (for some people) lead to poor self esteem.

So not only are we making poor choices in terms of health when we are using drugs and alcohol, but we also mess up our self esteem, and consequently stop caring so much about how well we treat ourselves.

This has to be reversed completely in recovery. It starts with the physical aspect. We stop putting chemicals into our bodies in order to self medicate. Simple abstinence from our drug of choice gets us started in the right direction.

But it can go further than that, and it should. Maybe not in your first week of recovery, but eventually you should be seeking better health.

At first, it is enough just to abstain from our drug. But as we progress in recovery, and start to live a better life, we should start to value ourselves more and more. Increased self esteem means that we value ourselves more, and thus we should *want* to take better care of ourselves.

Stop and think about the different parts of your life....your health, your career, your money, your home. Ultimately, what do you really have other than your health? If your health goes, then sobriety become irrelevant. **Death is worse than relapse.** Period.

Good health *includes* sobriety. Your health depends on abstinence from your drug of choice. But in order to live your best life in recovery, you should push yourself to be as healthy as you can reasonably be.

Does this mean you have to turn into some sort of health nut? No it does not. But it does mean that you need to start thinking of your overall health as being a priority in recovery.

You have your physical health, but there is also emotional health to consider. This can be just as important to your overall health, especially in recovery. But don't discount physical health either. For example, I have lost at least one close friend in recovery who failed to quit smoking cigarettes and make some other basic lifestyle changes in his sobriety. He was sober, but he was still living a very unhealthy lifestyle. The danger of it is that it can be easy to justify doing this because "at least now you are clean and sober." But if you continue to engage in other unhealthy behaviors, such as cigarette smoking for example, then you are not on your best path in recovery.

The key is to consider your *overall* health. We might call this the "holistic health model." Are you emotionally stable? Are you connecting spiritually? Physically fit? And so on. **Look at the whole picture.** That is what "holistic" means.

Caring for yourself should become a priority in recovery. This may take time as you rebuild your self esteem. **Allow time for it to happen.** The goal is to love yourself and do great things in your life. Good health is a foundation for that to happen.

Networking with others

When you are trapped in a cycle of addiction or alcoholism you need an intervention of some sort in order to break free from that cycle. Not a formal intervention per se, but rather a way to break free from constantly self medicating with drugs and alcohol every day. In some ways this intervention is about changing your behavior and doing something other than the drugs and finding a new way to live, but on another level the disruption in your life is really about *people*.

At least in the beginning, interventions (or disruptions) are about people; about communities. For example, go to 90 meetings in 90 days. That is a form of intervention. Do this without using any drugs or alcohol and that is an even stronger form of disruption to your addictive cycle. But what is really happening when you do something like that?

It's all about the *networking*, about the people, about the social aspect of recovery. In early recovery, this is critical. Why?

Because **you can't do it yourself.** You *tried*.

If you are like the typical addict or alcoholic, then you have tried to stop using on your own, and failed. You couldn't do it. This is actually what *defines* addiction. The inability to stop without help. The inability to stop without some form of disruption, or intervention.

Addiction isolates us. And, we cannot figure out how to undo our own problems in early recovery. We have to have help. If you don't need help, then go recover on your own! Enjoy life! The real addict or alcoholic *cannot* do it on their own, at least in the beginning. They need help and they need direction. So you have to ask for help, and you have to learn from others in recovery.

The shortcut for this is to simply go to a 12 step program. They are widespread and offer instant support. They are essentially free to someone with no money.

This is not to say that this networking aspect of recovery *has* to happen through a 12 step program. It is not a necessity. There are other paths, and other ways to connect with people in recovery. But in early sobriety, you could do much worse than to draw from the experience and strength of a 12 step program.

If you choose to avoid 12 step programs, you will probably need to find a way to talk with others in recovery. You will need their help to stay clean and sober, at least initially.

As you progress in recovery, **reliance on other people becomes less important.** Reliance on meetings and recovery communities becomes less important. If it doesn't, then you are doing something wrong. You should **not** be depending on others for your recovery after you have been clean and sober for a few years. But in early recovery, it makes sense that you

would want to network with others in recovery, and learn from them. This has been my experience, and I have witnessed this in others as well. We may still participate in recovery programs in long term sobriety, **but we do not depend on them**. Dependencies in general are something we are trying to unlearn.

With that said, networking in early recovery is hugely important. Use it. If you cannot figure out how to benefit and learn from others in recovery, take a shortcut and go to a 12 step program.

Personal growth

This is of the utmost importance. Personal growth *is* recovery.

Recovery basically comes in two stages. Early recovery, and "the rest of your life." Early recovery is a tough ride and you need lots of help and support to get through it. You have a ton of learning to do. Many people don't ever make it to "long term sobriety."

But of those who do make it past the early stage of recovery, they still have to live clean and sober, day in and day out, for the rest of their lives. Traditional wisdom says that we should take this "a day at a time," and I would not argue with that. It will always be a **day at a time** thing for those in recovery. But even so, many people in long term recovery end up relapsing eventually. But why?

The answer is *complacency*. Just because you make it to one year clean and sober does not insure sobriety for the rest of your life. The statistics are actually quite frightening. Simply accumulating clean time does **not** insure that you will continue to stay sober forever.

So what is the answer? The answer is *personal growth*. The answer is that **you must overcome complacency** in recovery by **pushing yourself** to grow as a person.

In my opinion this is the main key point of any recovery program. **This is the central pillar.** If you are not growing as a person, then you are on dangerous ground. If you are not committed to personal growth, then you are slowly headed for relapse. If you are stagnant and not pushing yourself to grow in any way, then eventually complacency will set in and you will revert to what you know best: self medicating with drugs or alcohol.

Therefore, personal growth is 90 percent of recovery (the other part being made up of networking with other people).

Now the question will inevitably arise: **how should I pursue personal growth?**

The answer is in two parts:

1) Pursue personal growth by **pushing yourself to pursue better health**, and to take better care of yourself (in mind, body, and spirit).

And

2) Pursue personal growth by **using your unique strengths and talents to help others**.

We have already talked about how caring for yourself and pursuing better health is important. Let's take a look at the second point:

Using your unique strengths and talents to help others

In long term recovery, the "networking" part of recovery is replaced. Instead of *asking for help and seeking guidance and direction* from others in early recovery, now you are *reaching out and extending your helping hand to others* so that you can help them. This may be help in terms of addiction and alcoholism or it may be another form of help entirely. The point is that you find a way to do this that is unique to you.

What is your gift to offer the world? What is it about you that makes you uniquely qualified to help others in some way? Find that lever and push it. Figure out how to leverage your talents to help others in a way that is meaningful to you.

Note that this will **not** happen overnight. You will not be doing this during your first week of sobriety. This is something that should happen over time as you progress in long term recovery. This is an *ideal* that you want to be moving closer to in your life. **Give it time** in order to see how you can best serve the world. **Try different things** and experiment. Chair an AA meeting. Sponsor someone in recovery. Take meetings into jails or rehab centers. Find a way to connect with others and see what works best for you. See what you are good at. Then, do it.

Once you start using your unique talents to help others then you are really experiencing an awesome life in recovery. This is what you should strive for and how you should live your life. **It is personal growth with a real purpose**—you are not just trying to "be a better person," you are essentially **trying to become better so that you can help others**. From a religious perspective, this is the height of trying to "do God's will." It is using power to help the world rather than just for personal gain. The awesome thing is that the world will pay you back a hundred-fold if you do this right, and you will grow stronger and stronger in your recovery.

Possible suggestions – actions you can take in recovery

Now let's move on to some specific suggestions for actions that you might take in your recovery. Remember, testing is key. What works for some will not work for others. The responsibility to find a successful path in sobriety is all yours. Experiment until you find what works.

Let me repeat that: you have to experiment. You have to try things and fail. Maybe a lot.

This is part of the learning process of recovery. Enjoy the journey. Enjoy testing out new recovery strategies.

Here are some recovery strategies that actually work for real people in recovery. We are going to look at each one in greater detail:

- * Fully immerse yourself in a recovery program
- * Live in a long term treatment center
- * Join a community, such as a church
- * Work in the addiction recovery field
- * Maintain a rigorous exercise program
- * Dedicate yourself to helping others in recovery

Fully immerse yourself in a recovery program

First of all, none of these suggestions are magic bullets as far as your individual success in recovery is concerned. That is why you have to test things out and see what works for you.

With that being said, I would suggest that most anyone who is brand new to recovery give this first suggestion (of using a recovery program) a serious look.

The idea is to find a recovery program (for most people this will be a 12 step program such as AA or NA, as that is what is widely available) *and dive into it head first*.

What are the finer points of using this strategy? Let's take a look.

Get heavily involved - If you want a recovery program to work for you, then you have to **completely commit yourself to it** without holding anything back. Remember the idea of taking **massive action**? That applies very well to 12 step programs. Understand that no recovery program has any power by itself. Programs are not magical. They do not have powerful secrets. They are just suggestions for how to live, steps that lead to personality change, and support from a community of people. Treat them as such.

So what does that mean for you? It means that a 12 step program is **only going to give back to you what you put into it**. This is true of *any* recovery program, whether it is 12 step based or not. If you give it a half hearted effort, guess what? You will relapse eventually.

Do not expect to be able to put in a medium-sized effort into any recovery program and stay clean. It will not happen. You either put in 100 percent and do well, or you put in less than that and you relapse eventually. **There is no in-between with recovery.**

You can even prove this to yourself by talking with people who are already in recovery and doing well. Ask them if they had to put forth a tremendous effort in order to achieve sobriety, or if they just had to put in a medium effort. Ask 10 people this question and you will get the same answer from every single one: **they had to commit 100 percent**. They had to try with all their might. It was the hardest thing they ever did. And so on. And they will go on to tell you that they may have tried the program in the past, but *they relapsed because they did not commit fully to it*. They did not give it their best shot. Only when they had gone back to their drug of choice and suffered enough and truly surrendered did they come back to the program and then give it their full commitment. It was *only then* that they were able to succeed in recovery.

This story is not unique. Ask a dozen people in recovery about these things and you will hear the same thing over and over again. If you want success in a recovery program, you must commit to it fully. You must dedicate your life to it. **It must become your highest priority in life**, above all other things. This is the only way to success with a recovery program. This is the only way to really stay sober: you must commit to it 100 percent, and make it the most important thing in your life. Anything less results in relapse.

Distraction as a tool in early recovery - When you commit yourself 100 percent to a recovery program, you get this huge added benefit to your recovery: it distracts you a great deal.

Distraction from what? *From yourself*. From your addictive mind. From your tendency towards using your drug of choice.

In early recovery, this is a *good* thing. You want to be distracted. The reason is because your normal way of thinking is to self medicate. Your normal way of thinking is full of patterns about using your drug of choice. You need relief from that old way of thinking. Distraction is a powerful tool.

Recovery is all about **change**. You have been using and abusing your drug of choice for a long time, and it has become a *pattern*. The lifestyle of drugs and alcohol has become heavily ingrained in your mind. It takes huge effort to get beyond that and to change that.

If you dedicate yourself to a recovery program, and spend several hours every single day in pursuit of a new life through that program, then this is a very powerful distraction. One reason that people suggest 90 meetings in 90 days is simply due to the constant distraction from your old way of life. It's all about change. It's all about creating new routines. If you don't make massive changes in your life then it is too easy to slide back into your old ways.

Lose yourself in order to rebuild your personality - If you completely immerse yourself in a recovery program then there is a tendency to sort of "lose yourself" in it. This is actually a good thing even though it sounds negative at first.

Before I got clean and sober I caught a glimpse of this process of "losing myself" and I resisted it. I said "drugs and alcohol are part of my personality and using drugs with my friends is part of my life, so what will become of me if I quit all of that stuff and dedicate my life to recovery?" I was scared that I would evaporate, that nothing would be left of me, or that I would feel empty and hollow inside. **Fear** held me back from embracing change in my life, and that included the idea of working a recovery program.

Well it turns out that these fears are unfounded, because anyone who leaves behind a life of drugs and alcohol and chaos and trades it in for ANY recovery program is going to experience *positive* change. The amazing thing that happens when you start taking positive action in a recovery program is that **you preserve the GOOD parts of your personality while losing the bad parts**. This is true of almost any successful path that you take in recovery and anyone who is staying clean and making progress can attest that this is true: **their personality always changed for the better** in recovery, never for the worse.

Essentially, recovery from addiction is about a *shift in personality*. In some programs this is brought about through a spiritual experience, and in others it is brought about through religious conversion. But ultimately those 2 things **are just labels that we use to describe a positive shift in personality**. When you are in active addiction, your mindset, and your personality, is very much focused on self medicating. That becomes the priority in your life. The idea of "losing yourself" to another cause, another program, to *anything*...is preferable to the one track mind that is addiction. You have to let something else in so that you can replace the bad, in other words. Dedicating yourself to a program can be a way to achieve this, at least in the short term.

Understand that later on in your recovery, this replacement strategy is not necessary. This is just as short term tactic to help people get through early recovery. Long term recovery becomes an exercise in personal growth. The point here is that **there is value in using a recovery program as a distraction in early recovery**.

Live in a long term treatment center

This does not work for everyone. However, it works for everyone who *wants* it to work. What does that mean?

It means that long term treatment offers anyone the support that they need to make recovery work for them. If you have tried other methods of treatment, and failed to stay clean and sober, then you might give long term rehab a shot. The worst that can happen is that you don't make any progress. The potential payoff is that you find a new life of sobriety and recovery.

Most people are not willing to go to long term. They think it is too big a commitment. Or, they believe that they have too many responsibilities "on the outside." Perhaps they are right. Long term is not for everyone. But if nothing else has worked for you, then you might consider it, especially if you actually *want* recovery for yourself.

So what are some of the finer points regarding long term rehab? Let's take a look:

A shortcut to full immersion in recovery - One thing that long term rehabs tend to do very well is to immerse you in a recovery program. This happens naturally because the whole point of being in treatment is to work on recovery, and so living in a rehab tends to give you laser focus and tons of support. Basically you live, eat, sleep, and breathe recovery while you are living in rehab. If not, then you are doing something wrong, and possibly wasting everyone's time. The point is to learn how to live clean and sober and *transition* to a successful life on the outside.

Most long term rehabs have you do certain things on a regular basis as part of your stay there. For example, they might require 90 meetings in 90 days, or have certain therapy groups each week, or have certain classes you might attend, or whatever. Pretty much all long term treatment centers have regular programming that is mandatory for the people to engage in. Therefore, it is sort of like a "sink or swim" atmosphere. You either participate and follow direction or you don't, and end up leaving, relapsing, or getting discharged from the program. Normally they are set up in such a way that you would have plenty of support and structure if you follow the rehab guidelines as they are outlined. Those who fail to do so normally get themselves into trouble anyway.

The most support you can get - There are other forms of treatment out there--nobody has to go to long term rehab of course. But pretty much every form of treatment available is going to be less intensive than long term. For example, there is:

- * Short term residential (28 day programs and less, etc.)
- * Counseling
- * Outpatient therapy

None of these options offers the amount of support that you can get from long term treatment. In fact, most long term treatment programs include all of these services in some form or another. And the bottom line is that long term is simply....longer! You are not only getting intensive treatment, you are getting *more* of it. For anyone who has completely surrendered and really wants recovery, this has to be an advantage for them.

Not a magic bullet, still fails for many people - One thing to keep in mind about long term rehab is that it is not a magic bullet by any means, and it can still fail for an addict or alcoholic, even if:

- * They are not mandated to be there, and are strictly voluntary.
- * Are self motivated to want to get clean and sober for themselves.
- * Follow the program and stay in treatment for a long period of time.

None of these factors (or even all 3 combined) will insure success. In fact, the recovery rates for long term and short term treatment are not really all that much different. There is a slight edge to long term treatment but the gap is much smaller than you would imagine it to be.

So why does long term treatment not do a better job of insuring success?

Basically, the answer is due to the nature of addiction itself. It is a disease that tells us we don't have a disease, and it leads us to self-sabotage and destructive behaviors. Addiction and alcoholism are just very, very difficult to overcome, and there are no external forces that can insure success. The only real ticket to success is the total and complete surrender of the individual, followed by unlimited willingness to do whatever it takes to stay clean and sober. Once you have that, it doesn't really matter what program you go to or what rehab you check into or whatever. The surrender is what creates the success, not the recovery program. It is an inside job, as they say. The mental shift to desperation is what unlocks the path to success.

Long term rehab is just a very supportive environment for "getting there." There are other paths, of course. But for most people, long term treatment offers the most advantages.

Join a community, such as a church

Not everyone who stays clean and sober does so with support from the 12 step community. Some alcoholics and addicts do so by joining other communities, such as a church. One thing you will notice if you go to a lot of 12 step meetings is that the people in them tend to talk down about religion as a potential solution, and they see the spiritually neutral 12 step program as being superior.

Don't be confused by this: **whatever works best for you is what you should be doing.** Again, test and experiment. There are plenty of people in recovery who have overcome addiction through religion. But again, like all of these suggestions, it is not for everyone.

Here are some of the key points to remember when using church or religion to overcome addiction or alcoholism:

Action and full immersion are key - Just like with 12 step programs, **what you put into a church community is what you are going to get out of it.** If you think that you can overcome an addiction by just showing up to a church for an hour every Sunday then you are probably kidding yourself. If you want to make religion work for you then you have to put in the effort, just like with any other solution.

There are no shortcuts in recovery. If you want fantastic results then you have to put in a tremendous amount of work. This is true whether you are using a 12 step program, a religious program, or a counseling and behavioral approach. It doesn't matter. *Any* of those solutions require intense commitment on your part and a tremendous amount of effort. Anything less results in relapse.

Some people will take to a religious based solution much more so than others. Testing is key; find out what works for you and then do it. Some people have to ease into the idea of church over time, and do so "when they become ready." Other people may never pursue a religious solution, and they may find deep meaning and spirituality in other ways.

The bottom line is this: if you are going to use religion or a church as your solution for addiction, then you need to dive into it head first and commit to it fully. Otherwise it will not help you to stay clean and sober.

Positive people will help strengthen your recovery - As a general rule, joining a church community will put you in contact with positive people. These are people who want to see you succeed and will encourage you to do so, rather than to discourage you or look down on you in any way. If you find a religious community that shuns you for your addiction, then guess what? Find a different church.

The fact is that most religious communities will embrace you with open arms and be supportive of your quest to find long term recovery and sobriety in your life. Having positive people in your life will only help you in your recovery. Again, there will of course be a religious slant to the support, so that has to work out for you personally. If it works for you, great. If not, move on and try another strategy or suggestion.

Find many of the same principles as in traditional recovery programs - If you study various recovery programs over time, you start to notice a lot of similarities among them. This is also true when you compare these recovery programs to spiritual principles found in the major religions of the world. For example, every spiritual principle found in the 12 steps of AA can also be found multiple times through the Christian bible.

The point here is that you can probably find what you need regardless of where you go *in terms of a recovery program*. It is just a matter of whether the solution fits you well or not. Everything you need to recover can be found in AA, but it can also be found in most religions, if they are a good fit for you. The key, again, is to test things out, and see what works well for you personally.

Work in the addiction recovery field

This is certainly not a cure-all, and it might not even really be a real "recovery strategy" at all....but it can definitely help if it is something you are interested in doing anyway.

You don't necessarily need to be a therapist or a counselor. Even the maintenance crew at a rehab can connect with people in recovery and make a difference. Plus, there are usually positions in treatment centers that do not require a degree in counseling. For example, most rehabs are set up to have "technician" type workers who oversee the clients and run some basic groups. You might also work in the detox area as a nurse or a nurse assistant, which they might even train you for.

So even without formal education, almost anyone could potentially work in the substance abuse field if they really want to.

But what are the benefits of doing so? Let's take a look:

We forget that we are addicts, every day. - One thing that is shocking to many people who are in recovery is how quickly they can forget that they are addicts or alcoholics. This is a big part of why daily meeting attendance is so helpful. We can actually forget that we have a disease.

Now you might say "that is ridiculous. I would never forget that I am an alcoholic or an addict." But the disease is more devious than that, because you only have to forget for a *half a second* for this to have an impact on you. For example, perhaps you see the flash of a beer or liquor ad, and for half a second, you think to yourself "man that looks good." Of course you immediately catch yourself, remember that you are addicted, and dismiss the thought. But these micro-moments add up, and if you do not have recovery firmly planted in your mind, then your brain will entertain that thought for about 2 seconds too long, and this will ultimately—eventually—make you miserable.

Working in the substance abuse field helps prevent this subtle mental trick from happening. You are surrounded by recovery every day, so your mind is more on guard against subtle triggers like this. Most people dismiss this idea out of hand, believing that it does not apply to them. But if you have ever attended daily 12 step meetings for a long time, then suddenly stopped going and noted how it made you feel, then you understand how this process can work.

Working in a treatment center is certainly not a cure for addiction. But it definitely helps, and it does so by **making you hyper-aware** of your own recovery.

Pushing others to grow forces you to push yourself. - This is the same reason that sponsorship works. If you work in the recovery field (or sponsor people in recovery for that matter), then you will be more likely to push yourself to grow and to succeed.

Why does this happen? It happens because we do not want to be hypocritical. We do not feel good about ourselves if we are teaching someone how to do something while not following through with that lesson ourselves. So, **helping others in recovery forces us to help ourselves.**

If you work in the recovery field then you will probably be faced with this situation. You will catch yourself saying "I need to take my own advice" and thus you can use this type of work to strengthen your own recovery.

Maintain a rigorous exercise program

Believe it or not, there are recovery programs out there for addiction and alcoholism that are based on exercise alone. While certainly not for everyone, the fact that some addiction recovery programs focus solely on exercise should show you that there really is something to it.

Test this out in your life. It will likely have a larger impact that you think. - Most people are inherently lazy and do not want to put forth the effort to test our exercise as a strategy for recovery. That's just the reality of the situation. Most people will not motivate themselves to try this out.

For those who do, the results are almost always amazing (and if they are not, just quit and go back to not exercising!).

It is impossible to describe the full benefits of regular, vigorous exercise without actually doing it for several months and getting into shape.

The hard part about vigorous exercise is that it takes a long time for you to get past the "pain" stage of the routine, and get to where it always feels good.

If you discipline yourself to get into great shape, and continue to push yourself to keep exercising on a regular basis, then it ALWAYS feels good to exercise, and will lift up your entire day. Yes, this has to do with endorphins—chemicals in your brain and in your body.

The tough part is to actually do it, and keep doing it, until it becomes easy. Once it becomes easy, and natural for you to exercise, *that* is when the benefits fully kick in. Not until then can you really appreciate how helpful exercise is to your recovery.

Regular exercise will teach you discipline, and that will translate into other areas of your life. – The other huge benefit of doing regular, vigorous exercise is that you will learn from the experience.

What will you learn?

You will learn *discipline*. You will learn how to follow through and how to complete a task, even when it is really hard to do so. If you learn how to push yourself in vigorous exercise then you will know how to push yourself in other areas of your life.

This is invaluable when it comes to dealing with problems and situations in your everyday life. Being in great shape and having the discipline to get there will give you the strength to handle other problems that might come up in your life.

Obviously this is just one strategy out of many. Exercise will not work for everyone. But it is one of the more powerful strategies you can use, and most people dismiss it entirely. Take advantage of your body's natural urge to be stronger and to be in motion. *Move your body and the rewards will reveal themselves to you over time*. It takes a long time but once you get into the regular rhythm of vigorous exercise, your recovery will have a huge boost and you will feel so much better about yourself in many different ways. Worth a try for most people.

Dedicate yourself to helping others in recovery

This may be the ultimate recovery strategy. In my experience, nothing is more powerful for helping people to stay clean and sober.

Helping other addicts is pretty much the strongest form of relapse prevention. - If you want to prevent relapse, then reach out and help other addicts and alcoholics on a regular basis. As mentioned above, this works well because we tend to practice what we preach, lest we feel like a hypocrite. So if you are talking the talk and telling others how to recover, then it is likely that you are also walking the walk yourself and living what you actually preach. If not, your recovery will not last long anyway.

Working directly with recovering addicts and alcoholics is especially powerful **because we are constantly reminded of where we came from** and where we have been.

Discover your purpose as you stay clean and help others. - One thing that makes recovery amazing is discovering not only that you can help others, but that **you have unique gifts and talents that allow you to help others in a unique way**. This does wonders for your self esteem because you realize that you have real purpose; that the world can actually benefit because of who you are and how you can reach out and help others.

Understand that not every person in recovery has to go on and work in the recovery field, or dedicate their lives to helping addicts or alcoholics. But every person in recovery *should* figure out what they are good at and what their gift is to the world. It is then that they can achieve their best life in recovery.

Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some of the more frequently asked questions I have heard when discussing these topics with others:

Do you have to do all of this stuff to stay clean? – Of course not! Don't get overwhelmed.

It is easy to get overwhelmed in early recovery, and it is easy to feel like this stuff is all piling up on your to-do list. It doesn't have to be that way.

Focus is important in early recovery. When you first get clean and sober, the key is to keep it simple. Focus on maintaining sobriety at any cost, and then slowly expand from there.

Remember, most of the strategies that are mentioned in this guide are just **suggestions that have worked for other recovering addicts and alcoholics**. You don't have to do all of them, or any of them necessarily. The real key is that you develop the willingness to find your own path in recovery, and that you keep testing things out until you find success.

It is your responsibility to find a way to stay clean and sober. No one can show you exactly how. They can offer suggestions, they can tell you what worked for them, but the testing and the doing part....that is all up to you. Take action. Start simple, and focus on one thing at a time. Master the idea of abstinence from drugs and alcohol first, then expand your horizons.

Can you do this stuff and still use a 12 step program? – You can definitely use the ideas and strategies outlined here with a 12 step program. There are no conflicts in that regard. In fact, if you frequent a 12 step program, you will notice that various people who attend AA also incorporate many of the ideas found here also. The point is that you do not necessarily have to use the 12 step program in order to use these strategies, but you certainly can. Remember, test things out. Keep an open mind. Do what works for you.

Some addicts and alcoholics wonder: Is recovery even possible for me? – There is a saying in traditional recovery: "No matter how far down you have fallen in your addiction, you will learn that your experience can benefit others." This is certainly true, and no matter how bad your life has become due to your addiction, recovery is possible. Not only that, but the opportunity is huge, and the chance for an awesome new life is available to anyone who is willing to surrender to their disease.

It is quite normal for the addict or alcoholic to believe that recovery is NOT possible for them. Many people who finally get clean and sober say that they never used to think it was possible either. All you have to do is become willing to try, to ask for help, and to take a chance with sobriety. It is a risk and it is scary to get clean and sober. But the reward is well worth it. I don't care who you are....you *can* get clean and sober.

Can you find happiness in simple, everyday things again? Normal life is boring for the addict. – Again, this is a very typical question for addicts and alcoholics who are still abusing their drug of choice. Life without partying seems boring. Facing the idea of a future with no drugs or alcohol may sound like a death sentence. This is a very common thought process among addicts and alcoholics.

The truth is that you *can* find happiness in recovery, but it does take time. It will not happen in the first day or maybe even in the first week. That is why most people have to be pretty miserable before they will surrender to the disease.

Over time, "normal" life activities become fun and even exciting again. A new passion will develop in you, even if you do not believe it is possible without the drugs. Life will become fun and exciting again if you stay clean and sober. It just takes time. You are not unique, in that **many have come before you** in the past who loved drugs and alcohol just as much, yet they were able to move on, get sober, and learn how to enjoy life again. It is possible to enjoy your life again without drugs and alcohol. Give it a chance, it takes a bit of time, but it is well worth it.

How can I use an holistic approach to make my recovery stronger? There is a danger in recovery of being tripped up on something and having one little thing lead you to relapse. If you are working an **holistic program of recovery** then this becomes less likely of happening over time.

Picture the different parts of your life when you are taking positive action in recovery: you may have career, family, finances, education, relationships, and so on.

In a real world example, maybe this means that you have some family, a handful of close friends, a significant other, a decent job, and certain things that you do for your recovery. Now if something happens to one of these things (like you lose your job), does that devastate your life to the point of relapse? If it does, then you are not well protected in your recovery.

Because things *do* happen in recovery...anyone could lose their job suddenly, or lose a family member, or a significant other, and so on. Disasters can happen, and given enough time, probably will. So if you work a strong, **holistic** program of recovery, you can insure than you stay protected from the threat of relapse.

So what is a strong program of recovery? **It is action based and holistic in nature.** That means you don't put all of your energy into one area of your life. Instead, you grow strong by taking positive actions in *many* areas of your life. You get stronger spiritually. You strengthen your relationships by communicating honestly. You grow stronger emotionally. You may become healthier physically, and get into better shape and avoid more disease and illness.

If you approach your recovery from an holistic standpoint, it just means that you are taking positive action in *many* different areas of your life. You don't limit your recovery to just spiritual growth. This is a very important concept because so many people in recovery tend to limit their focus, and they miss out on a lot of potential growth that way.

What is the most valuable action I can take in my recovery? -This depends entirely on what stage of recovery or addiction you are at.

* If you are still using drugs or alcohol, then the most valuable action you can take is **tosurrender**.

* If you have already surrendered and you are starting on your journey in early recovery, then the most valuable thing you can do is to **take massive action**. Whether you are in a recovery program, or simply making a positive effort, the key is to take massive action and distract yourself from the threat of relapse.

* If you have been clean and sober for some time but are not really growing any more in your recovery, then the most valuable action to can take is to **push yourself towards personal growth**. Really this is just another kick start for yourself to get back into positive action.

* If you have been clean and sober for many years, then the most valuable action you can take is to **overcome complacency** by doing two things:

- 1) Seeking holistic growth.
- 2) Reaching out and helping others (preferably in recovery).

* If you are on the verge of relapse, then the most valuable action you can take is to **talk with another person in recovery** and tell them about it and enlist their support.

Your next most valuable action in recovery will vary, depending on what your current situation is. If you do not know your next best action, **ask for help**. Seek guidance from others who have achieved what you want in recovery (sponsorship).

If you do know what your next best action in recovery is, then do it!

What can I do if the 12 step program does not work for me? -There are basically two options for people who have failed to stay clean and sober with a 12 step program:

- 1) Try it again, with renewed enthusiasm, or
- 2) Try something else.

Those are the only 2 possibilities. There are many people who have kept coming back to the 12 step program, and then "finally got it."

On the other hand, there are many people who have eventually turned to other recovery strategies, be it counseling, religion, holistic approaches, or whatever.

The key is to test things out and find a path in recovery that works for you. It is your responsibility to do so. You have to find a way to stay clean and sober. It is entirely up to you.

I suggest that most addicts and alcoholics who want to change their life to start with the 12 step program. It does not work for everyone, and it is not a magic bullet, but I still think it is the best starting point. If that does not work, and you have given it an honest effort, then move on and try different things. Choose a recovery strategy from this guide and apply it in your life.

For the most part, the actual method that you choose to stay clean and sober is irrelevant. Any abstinence based solution will work the same *if* you dedicate your entire life to it. The key is in your **level of willingness**, not in some magic formula that somehow keeps people away from drugs.

It is possible that some recovery strategies will suit you better than others. But ultimately, realize that your own level of surrender and willingness is what will really drive your success (or lack thereof) in recovery. The 12 steps are a path that really do work, but they are not the only path.

Living the dream of a new life in recovery.

Keep pushing yourself to grow in recovery. Never settle for the status quo in your own personal growth. Find your vision and live your best life. - Success in recovery tends to build on itself. If you are practicing the principles and strategies that are outlined here, and taking positive action on a regular basis, then good things will start to happen.

There are a lot of concepts and strategies here to absorb. There are a lot of suggestions here for possible actions you can take in recovery. The key is that you **start doing something**. An awesome new life can develop from taking even the smallest actions in early recovery.

It all starts with positive action. With the right attitude, continuous positive action will give rise to real purpose. You will see that your actions do make a difference and that you can help others.

This will build into *vision*, eventually. You will see how you can better use your strengths and talents in recovery to better serve the world. So you will push yourself to grow and to work towards this vision of a better life in recovery. You will start experiencing good things, and benefit from helping others, and you will want to do *more* of it. So a vision will take shape and you will push yourself towards these goals in your recovery.

Take positive action. Use your momentum and success in recovery to build from. Discover the life you were meant to live. Find joy in helping others and experience the happiness that comes from living a full life in recovery.

If you found this helpful, **please share it with others!**

Recommended resources

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.