

## **Wellness Pointers for Persons in Recovery**

I firmly believe that integrating a wellness-oriented lifestyle with working one's chosen recovery program enhances the quality of sobriety enjoyed by persons recovering from addictive disorders. Unfortunately, millions of people in recovery unwittingly short-change themselves of years — if not decades — of joyful and productive living by succumbing to heart disease, cancer, diabetes and a host of other preventable illnesses associated with self-destructive lifestyle patterns. A prime prerequisite for deriving maximum benefit from recovery lies in taking charge of one's health and consciously embracing a wellness lifestyle.

The following pointers are designed to assist your clients in incorporating a wellness-oriented lifestyle into their recovery programs. Please feel free to reproduce this article and share it with your clients. While specifically targeted to recovering alcoholics and addicts, these principles also apply to persons recovering from other addictive disorders. These suggestions are meant to apply to most persons in most situations. In the event of pre-existing health problems, please advise your clients to consult with their primary physician concerning the applicability of these and any other wellness suggestions to their particular circumstances.

### **Nutritional awareness**

1. Sound nutrition is one of the cornerstones of lasting sobriety. Eat three wholesome meals a day and don't skip meals. A balanced diet emphasizing fresh vegetables, fruits, grains, and lean sources of protein is highly recommended.
2. Go lightly on (or eliminate) caffeine, refined sugars and white flour products. Refined carbohydrates are "nutritional stressors" and "empty calories." It is also advisable to cut back on meats, dairy products and other high-fat foods.
3. Maintain your proper weight through a combination of balanced diet and exercise.
4. Consider adding multivitamin supplements to your daily routine. However, remember that vitamin supplements are not a substitute for a balanced, nutritious diet.

### **Physical fitness**

5. A regular program of vigorous exercise is highly recommended for cardiovascular endurance, as well as for safeguarding against relapse. If you choose walking, build up to a program of 45 minutes, five times a week. If you prefer more vigorous exercise, (e.g. running, swimming or aerobic dance), a regimen of three-to-five workouts per week (20-30 minutes per workout) is recommended.
6. Choose an exercise that you enjoy — otherwise you won't stay with it.
7. Set aside several minutes each day for stretching exercises for flexibility. Ideally, you should also work a muscle toning exercise session (weight lifting or other resistance training) into your schedule at least twice a week.

### **Stress management and social supports**

8. Practice the Serenity Prayer throughout the day. In my opinion, this is the most powerful stress management tool available.
9. Recognize that clear and harmonious communications are essential to stress reduction and sobriety maintenance, as most stresses in our lives arise from lack of harmony in our communications with others.
10. Learn the art of self-nurturance and giving and receiving position strokes. Get (and give) at least five hugs per day!
11. Set aside a daily mind-quieting period (10-20 minutes) for meditation, prayer, listening to relaxing music or just sitting quietly.
12. Learn the art of time management and avoid over-scheduling yourself. Consciously schedule some "slack time" into your daily routine.

13. Be sure to get 7-8 hours of sleep each night. If you suffer from insomnia, ask yourself if you are consuming too much caffeine or sugar. Take a warm bath or otherwise relax yourself prior to going to bed.

### **Curbing nicotine addiction**

14. While many recovering alcoholics and addicts are smokers, most would like to quit. If you are struggling to free yourself from nicotine addiction, discuss your desire to quit with your primary physician. Check out low cost stop-smoking support groups offered by your health plan and community organizations, such as the American Cancer Society and American Lung Association. Many former smokers have used hypnosis to help them kick the habit. Be persistent — the average smoker quits smoking five times before kicking the habit for good.

### **Quality of life**

15. Appreciate the connection between personal fulfillment and positive health. It's no coincidence that throughout history, great composers, artists and other persons driven by creative fulfillment have consistently enjoyed unusually long life spans.

16. Strive to find and express your unique sense of purpose in life, and strike a healthy balance between work, relaxation and creative pursuits.

Encourage your clients in recovery to reap the many benefit associated with a wellness-oriented lifestyle through incorporating these and other common sense wellness principles into their lives. Remind them that they don't need to attempt to instantly adopt all of these suggestions. As a counselor, you can play an important supportive role in helping your clients in recovery make the transition to a healthy lifestyle, one day at a time. To the extent to which you personally embrace a wellness lifestyle, you will serve as an effective role model for your clients in this important area. Make pursuing health conducive lifestyle choices a hobby and enjoy the process. To your health!