Long-term addiction is a lonely life to live, where at one time for many it was fun and games and partying. The loneliness and despair of never being able to recapture the good old days, but the need to keep trying to do something that can’t be done, is suffering enough. I indulge in an activity that I crave and this activity has cost me a lot of money, money that would have normally been spent on food for my children and/or on my house payment. I spend countless hours worrying about where I am going to get my next supply, where I am going to get the $ for my next supply, how I am going to get my next supply. It keeps me awake where I don’t sleep for 48 to 72 hours, sometimes longer.

-Zeke Z.
My mind is obsessed with thoughts of drinking. “I have to drink. I have to drink.” The only way to make the thoughts stop is to drink. And once I drink, drinking activates a compulsion for MORE. That’s the bitch of it—I drink to stop the obsessive thinking but the drinking fuels my compulsion to drink, which perpetuates my obsessive thinking which makes me want to drink to stop my obsessive thinking about drinking. It gets to the point where I can not think about anything but getting another drink, and once I drink, I continue to drink until I am drunk, sick, and out of control.

Andrea A.’s e-mail expresses the powerlessness that she has over her consumption of alcohol and other drugs. And she expresses most eloquently that her powerlessness is rooted in her obsessive thinking about drinking that fuels an internal compulsion that creates an unyielding preoccupation with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

It’s almost formulaic, isn’t it? Obsessive-thinking + Physical cravings + Compulsive-driven behavior = Preoccupation with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

What is meant by the phrase, preoccupation with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs? It means that the focus of living one’s life narrows to the following considerations:

- The acquisition of alcohol and other drugs
- The consumption of alcohol and other drugs
- Devising ways and means to hide one’s consumption of alcohol and other drugs
• Recovering from one’s consumption of alcohol and other drugs

Preoccupation with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs fuels the beast with utter disregard for all that you hold sacred—family, friends, work, school, community involvement, financial and legal well-being.

You know the refrain from that old song, there ain’t no mountain high enough, ain’t no valley low enough, ain’t no river wide enough to keep me from . . . That describes the lengths to which an individual with a Substance Dependence problem will go to ensure that they can consume alcohol and other drugs. Emotional well-being, physical well-being, spiritual well-being, private and public humiliation, risk to life and limb are non-considerations.

Betsy B. acknowledges that no force exists within her that can match her brother’s sheer determination and utter preoccupation with consuming alcohol and other drugs.

I stand and watch as he throws himself in the path of an on-coming train, and I keep trying to pull him out of the line of fire. Yet he keeps breaking away from me and throwing himself right back in front of the train.

Carl C. expresses a commonly held sentiment. There’s almost as much of a high in the drama surrounding the acquisition of alcohol and other drugs as there is in the consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

I like the excitement in planning, picking up, and the first line but I hate the rest of it.
Doreen D. demonstrates that there’s no end of creativity and deception that she would go to, to acquire Percodan and Vicodin.

I would go on the Internet and get five different “online doctors” to write seven different legally acquired prescriptions (Percodan, Vicodin, you name it) for any number of aches and pains that I would make up from research I did on the web and then would complain about to these online doctors. I would then fill them from seven different online pharmacies.

Evan E. expresses his single-minded determination to outwit, outfox, and outlast any obstacle that may deter him from acquiring and consuming alcohol.

An active alcoholic, determined to drink will drink no matter what barriers are placed in front of them. They will find ways to fake out alco-sensors, they will go to any lengths and extremes to get that booze.

Fred F.’s e-mail expresses the #1 priority in his and his wife’s life—getting pain pills—and the lengths they would go to in order to acquire them.

My wife and I both were addicted to pain pills. We have three children. I had been taking pills for about 15 years. The nights when we should have been at home with the kids, we would have them out with us trying to find something (Percocet). Knowing that if we did not find anything our next day could not go on if we did not find anything. I felt like I could not go to work the next morning.
Gloria G.’s preoccupation with acquiring cocaine took precedence over her job performance to the point that she lost her job.

I got fired from work because I spent less and less time in the office and more and more time roaming around to hook up with my dealer.

Horace H.’s sister’s preoccupation with illegally acquired and purchased prescriptions became so elaborate that he says she had to devise a tracking system for when and where she had used forged prescriptions.

I found a map in her car... She had highlighted seventeen different locations—seventeen mind you—where she had gone to pharmacies to use forged prescriptions. She kept an elaborate journal of days, dates, and times when she had gone to a specific pharmacy.

Use the following Pathfinder’s Exercise to examine to what degree your day is spent in activities that enable you to acquire alcohol and other drugs.

**Pathfinder’s Exercise**

1) How much time in a day do you spend thinking about, planning, and/or preparing for acquiring alcohol and other drugs?

2) How much time in a day do you spend planning how to acquire money to purchase alcohol and other drugs?

3) How much time in a day do you spend in activities whose purpose is to acquire money in order to consume alcohol and other drugs (e.g., lying, steal-
What Is Preoccupation with One’s Consumption of Alcohol and Other Drugs?

ing, manipulating, going to cash stations, selling items, shoplifting, returning stolen goods for refunds, borrowing money, stealing prescription pads, forging prescriptions, writing bad checks, covering bad checks, prostitution, drug dealing, gambling, going to open houses to steal medications, and/or doctor shopping)?

4) What impact does the amount of time that you spend acquiring alcohol and other drugs have on your life (e.g. relationships, work, school, financial affairs, legal affairs)?

5) How much time in a day do you spend physically obtaining alcohol and other drugs from your source?

6) What do your answers to questions #1 through #6 mean in regards to whether or not you may have a problem with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs?

Preoccupation with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs also refers to your actual consumption of alcohol and other drugs. For the non-problem consumer of alcohol and other drugs, consumption is an event in a part of their life, e.g., a celebration of a special event, a dinnertime custom, observance of a religious ritual, social interaction, or proper use of prescribed medication. That’s not so for the person who has a Substance Dependence problem. For an individual who has a Substance Dependence problem, their life becomes filled more and more with consuming alcohol and other drugs and less and less with important social, occupational, and/or recreational activities.

The more the consumption of alcohol and other drugs takes
over one’s life, the more constricted one’s life becomes. The more the consumption of alcohol and other drugs takes over one’s life, the less consistently one shows up in their life. The more the consumption of alcohol and other drugs takes over one’s life, the less time, energy, and motivation one has to participate as fully in their life as they had previous to developing a Substance Dependence problem.

For example, there doesn’t seem to be any room in Iris I.’s husband’s life for her and her son. They feel the effects of her husband’s life becoming reduced to little more than working and drinking.

All he wants to do is sit on the porch, drink, and watch TV from the minute he gets home from work and the entire weekend. Oh, forget about asking him to do anything! Just recently, my eight year old son asked me why Daddy tells him he is tired all of the time (his excuse to him for not going/doing anything) and he wants to know why he doesn’t like to do things. He did not want to attend his basketball game last week and it broke his heart.

John J. writes that his family members’ lives were reduced to nothing more than getting high. Everyone and everything else took a distant second place to their consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

My family has been to hell and back because of crack! They were so into it that it took them over. All their life consisted of was buying, selling, and getting high. They didn’t care about anyone or anything. Just wanting to chase that buzz all day and all night.

In yet another example, Kristin K. bemoans her husband’s
priorities. She writes that her husband does precious little other than drink and work.

I see the importance that alcohol plays in my husband’s life. It is the #1 priority for him. He comes home from work at 4 and I get home at 5:30. By the time I get home, he’s got 5 or 6 or more under his belt. He sits at the table and drinks. One day I got home at 6:00 and he had 11 already! That’s just pounding them down and drinking to get drunk. Every day I walk in the front door and the first thing I look for is the empty cans on the table.

And finally, much of Larry L’s wife’s day seems to be spent under the influence of alcohol—at times placing their children at risk.

I knew she was drinking at and before work. I knew she was driving drunk (more than once with my kids in the car before I fully realized how drunk she would get). She did not mess around with glasses anymore or with going to bars. She drank straight from the bottle. And, as you can well imagine, the bottles were hidden everywhere.

Use the following Pathfinder’s Exercise to examine to what degree you spend your day under the influence of alcohol and other drugs and the impact it has on your life.

**Pathfinder’s Exercise**

1) How much time in a day do you spend consuming alcohol and other drugs?
2) How much time in a day do you spend under the influence of alcohol and other drugs?
3) What impact does your answer to question #1 have on your life (e.g., relationships, work, school, financial and legal well-being, physical well-being, emotional well-being)?

4) What impact does your answer to question #2 have on your life (e.g., relationships, work, school, financial and legal well-being, physical well-being, emotional well-being)?

5) What do your answers to questions #1 through #4 mean in regards to whether or not you have a problem with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs?

Preoccupation with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs refers not only to acquiring and consuming alcohol and other drugs but hiding your consumption of alcohol and other drugs. You know the old line, “that’s my story and I’m sticking to it.” That drama gets played out all the time when an individual with a Substance Dependence problem is hiding their consumption of alcohol and other drugs. A hand grenade can’t dislodge a person with a Substance Dependence problem from their cover story. For covering up is what they do, it’s what they must do. It’s the only way an individual with a Substance Dependence problem knows how to survive.

Read below the extremes to which Mary M.’s husband hides his consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

He will lie to me to the bitter end. I even put the “water bottle” in front of him and told him to tell me what was in it. He said it’s nothing and looked at me like I was crazy! I told him to taste it. He still said it was nothing. It was Vodka! I smelt it in front of him and told him I knew he was sneaking out at night and drinking in
the garage. He's just pouring the water out of these water bottles and filling them with Vodka. He told me the last time he drank was in January sometime. What a liar! He can lie to me looking straight at me and without batting an eye and the evidence is right there in front of him.

Nick N. says his wife has her own way of hiding her drinking.

My wife is drinking in the garage and thinks no one knows it. She'll say something like, “I'm going outside to look at the garden” or “I need some fresh air.” Then regardless of what time of day it is, she goes to bed and stays there until the next day when she's suppose to go to work.

Paula P.'s husband knows that she takes Vicodin but she has hidden from him the extent to which she is consuming them.

He knows I take them, but he thinks that it's only on occasion. He's unaware that I take them all the time. I got nineteen 7.5's yesterday and now I'm down to 6 and I told myself I would lay off it for a while after these were gone, but I got a call offering ten more and I know I'll end up going and getting them. And he doesn't have a clue about any of this.

Ronald R. says his wife was able to hide her drinking from him for years.

Recently I found out that my wife was drinking behind my back for 2 years. She would wait till I went to bed and sit up and drink till she went to sleep. She got to the point to where she started drinking 2½ pints of Vodka a day.
Pathfinder’s Exercise

1) How much time in a day do you spend covering up the activities associated with acquiring and consuming alcohol and other drugs?

2) What impact does the time that you spend covering up those activities associated with acquiring and consuming alcohol and other drugs have on your life?

3) What are the ways and means by which you cover up those activities associated with acquiring and consuming alcohol and other drugs?

4) Why do you believe that you need to cover up your consumption of alcohol and other drugs?

5) What does the fact that you cover up those activities associated with acquiring and consuming alcohol and other drugs mean about whether or not you have a problem with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs?

The last aspect of preoccupation with consuming alcohol and other drugs is *recovering from your consumption*. As much of a drain on your life as acquiring, consuming, and hiding your consumption of alcohol and other drugs is, so is recovering from consuming alcohol and other drugs. This drain manifests itself in how you feel, what you miss out on in your life, and how missing out on life makes you feel.

Alex A. paints a vivid picture of the cycle of acquiring, consuming, deceiving, and recovering only to go out and do it all over again. The sense of loss and remorse from always being too sick to fully participate in his life just leaps off the page.
I would down a pint of vodka in less than a half hour every evening for the last year or so. She knew a lot of the time and would confront me on it, but I would lie and deny everything. I got sick of lying, deceiving, driving drunk, being tired, spending our money on alcohol, feeling sick in the morning, lying, feeling guilty, not performing to my full potential at work, lying, not exercising, worrying about my health, etc. I got sick of drinking. I finally admitted it to my wife, and I think it will be one of the best things that I’ve ever done in my life.

Tony T. knows only too well what’s in store for him once his wife goes off on one of her cocaine binges—drama, broken promises, separation, and reunification—followed by his wife’s inevitable crashing period.

Four days ago I again told my wife to get out in a fit of rage, and what followed was our typical scenario—"I’m going to stay clean. It’s not worth losing my family. No more lies," etc. She left but did not take her things, stayed gone for four days, and then last night returned for her normal crashing period and at present is sleeping, which will go on for another two days.

Wally W. recounts yet another vacation ruined by his wife’s drinking and the lost days caused by her need to recover from partying the night before.

We went to Florida last week. I can’t begin to describe how sorry I was to do this. She drank way too much—after all we were on vacation (or so she reasoned). I spent my hard-earned money being miserable—haunted by her behavior. After going out till all hours of the
night, she would sleep into the middle of the next day while I was left to deal with our four children as she struggled to recover from the drinking she did the night before. But then again that’s really no different than our day-to-day lives, at least the last four years.

**Pathfinder’s Exercise**

1) How much time do you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs?

2) What are you missing out on as a result of the time that you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs?

3) What impact does the amount of time you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs have on your ability to fulfill your roles and responsibilities?

4) What impact does the amount of time you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs have on your relationships?

5) What impact does the amount of time you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs have on your professional/academic life?

6) What impact does the amount of time you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs have on your participation in leisure time activities?

7) What impact does the amount of time you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs have on your emotional well-being?

8) What impact does the amount of time you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs have on your physical well-being?
9) What impact does the amount of time you spend recovering from your consumption of alcohol and other drugs have on your spiritual well-being?

You may know the cycle only too well. The more enmeshed in the cycle you become, the more preoccupied you become with keeping the cycle going. Acquiring, consuming, covering-up, and recovering are the steps involved in the noose of Substance Dependence tightening more and more around what your life once was. In the next chapter, *Does Your Preoccupation With the Consumption of Alcohol and Other Drugs Reduce Your Participation in Your Life?*, we’ll examine the impact that one’s preoccupation with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs has on their life.