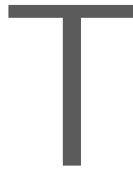


Chapter 11

Stressors That Impact Your Physical Well-being



When you work in the right consciousness, when your work becomes organically a part of your whole self, and when you do your work out of that commitment, no matter what other people do, no matter what the compensation may be, do it for the health of your own soul, then you open the door by which the affluence of the Universe flows forth into your life.

- Eric Butterworth

You know what you feel like when you haven't gotten enough sleep night after night. How does your day go when you haven't eaten all day? How does the crash and burn after loading up on sugar and caffeine affect you? What do you feel like after having been sick with the flu all week? What does two straight weeks of that old lower back pain flaring up do to your resolve to stay clean and sober? How does the heaviness of feeling depressed affect your willingness to complete your Recovery-based daily routines? Add to all the above the stress of completing a big project at work or the daily grind of raising your children or the never-ending demands to live up to your life partner's expectations.

Maintaining your health and well-being is essential to staying clean and sober. Keeping your body clean of toxic substances such as sugar, caffeine, and alcohol and other drugs is essential to [re]constructing a Recovery-based lifestyle. Remaining abstinent from those behaviors that tear your body down is necessary for minimizing the onset of stress caused by the deterioration of your physical well-being. There's no getting around this simple truism—if you don't maintain your physical well-being, you'll place yourself at greater risk for activating the process of relapse.

So in this chapter we'll focus on stressors that can adversely affect your physical well-being. When your physical well-being has been adversely affected, you're much more easily overwhelmed by stress. When this occurs you're much more vulnerable to impulsively act-out in order to alleviate the amount of fatigue, hunger, pain, or stress that you're experiencing. As you can no doubt imagine this is a recipe for disaster.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Stressors that may adversely affect your physical well-being.

- 1) Consumption of ANY alcohol and other drugs
- 2) Participation in ANY compulsive behavior
- 3) Negligence of pre-existing and co-existing physical and emotional disorders
- 4) Negligence of self-care of your physical-being
- 5) Exposure to circumstances, events, and/or people that have an adverse affect on your physical well-being
- 6) Negligent management of PAW symptoms

The first stressor that we'll discuss is *consuming alcohol and other drugs that are not your drug of choice*. The important idea to accept here is that you can no longer consume ALL alcohol and other drugs. Chemical dependency is a chronic progressive disease in which you can no longer control your consumption of any alcohol and other drugs. The implication of this fact is that your disease has nothing to do with what kind of alcohol and other drugs you consume. Your disease has everything to do with what happens to your mind, body, and soul when you consume any alcohol and other drugs.

Therefore, if you consume alcohol and other drugs other than your alcohol and other drugs of choice, you may experience a phenomena known as cross-addiction. Cross addiction occurs when you become addicted to a different drug in the same classification as your drug of choice or become addicted to another drug from a different classification of drugs. A second point to consider when consuming alcohol and other drugs different than

your drug of choice is that you're much more vulnerable to resume consumption of your alcohol and other drugs of choice once you begin consuming alcohol and other drugs that are not your drug of choice.

Pathfinder's Compass

Continued consumption of ANY alcohol and other drugs that you consider not to be your drug of choice.

- 1) Identify your alcohol and other drugs of choice.
- 2) Identify what other alcohol and other drugs you consume.
- 3) Identify what alcohol and other drugs of choice you can continue to consume while trying to remain abstinent from your alcohol and other drugs of choice.
- 4) Identify what impact consuming the alcohol and other drugs identified in step #3 will have on your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.
- 5) Identify what impact consuming the alcohol and other drugs identified in step #3 will have on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 6) Identify what impact your continued consumption of those alcohol and other drugs identified in step #3 will have on your self-esteem.
- 7) Identify what impact your continued consumption of those alcohol and other drugs identified in step #3 will have on your relationship with your friends and family members.
- 8) Identify what impact your continued consumption of those alcohol and other drugs identified in step #3 will have on your relationship with your

Recovery-based support system.

- 9) Identify what impact your continued consumption of those alcohol and other drugs identified in step #3 of this exercise will have on your spiritual practice.
- 10) Identify how your continued consumption of those alcohol and other drugs identified in step #3 of this exercise can activate the process of relapse for your alcohol and other drugs of choice.

The second stressor to be discussed is *participation in compulsive behaviors*. As we've discussed previously, a behavior is compulsive when your relationship with that behavior mirrors your relationship with alcohol and other drugs. Exhibiting symptoms such as loss of control, over-reliance on your willfulness to attempt to control the behavior, and an ever-increasing preoccupation with the compulsive behavior are similar symptoms that you experience with your consumption of alcohol and other drugs. To participate in behaviors such as gambling, sexing, exercising, work, internet surfing, and shopping in a manner that consumes your time, medicates your emotions, enables you to isolate, and by which you experience adverse consequences are indications that your disease is still active—it's just being acted-out through these compulsive behaviors.

The danger of participating in compulsive behaviors is the amount of stress it places on your physical and emotional being. Overinvolvement in any activity can lead to the deterioration and/or neglect of your physical and emotional self-care. Once your physical well-being deteriorates, you become at greater risk for the process of

relapse to be activated. Use the questions below to better determine what your relationship is with specific behaviors that may be compulsive and the potential adverse consequences that your participation in these behaviors may have.

Pathfinder's Compass

Continued participation in ANY behavior in a compulsive and/or out of control manner that mimics your relationship with alcohol and other drugs.

- 1) Identify what compulsive behaviors you participate in (e.g., excessive risk taking, exercising, gambling, internet surfing, overeating, pornography, sexing, spending money, working).
- 2) Identify what impact your participation in the compulsive behaviors identified in step #1 has on your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.
- 3) Identify what impact your participation in the compulsive behaviors identified in step #1 has on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 4) Identify what impact your participation in the compulsive behaviors identified in step #1 has on your self-esteem.
- 5) Identify what impact your participation in the compulsive behaviors identified in step #1 has on your relationships with friends and family members.
- 6) Identify what impact your participation in the compulsive behaviors identified in step #1 has on your participation with your Recovery-based support system.

- 7) Identify what impact your participation in the compulsive behaviors identified in step #1 has on your spiritual practice.
- 8) Identify how your continued participation in the compulsive behaviors identified in step #1 can activate the process of relapse.

The third stressor we'll discuss is *neglect of pre-existing and/or co-existing physical and emotional disorders*. It's likely that you've neglected taking care of yourself while active in your disease. So it would not be unusual if you were experiencing either pre-existing and/or co-existing physical and emotional disorders. It's critical that you receive an appropriate evaluation of both your physical and emotional well-being as well as the appropriate treatment for any problems that are discovered. Use the following questions as an opportunity for you to focus on your physical and emotional well-being as well as the impact that neglecting any existing physical and emotional disorders has on your ability to remain abstinent.

Pathfinder's Compass

Negligence of untreated pre-existing and/or co-existing physical and emotional disorders.

- 1) Identify any pre-existing and/or co-existing physical disorder(s) that you must be treated for.
- 2) Identify pre-existing and/or co-existing emotional disorder(s) that you must be treated for.
- 3) Identify the impact that the existence of any untreated physical disorder has on your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

- 4) Identify the impact that the existence of any untreated physical disorder has on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 5) Identify the impact that the existence of any untreated physical disorder has on your self-esteem.
- 6) Identify the impact that the existence of any untreated physical disorder has on your relationship with your friends and family members.
- 7) Identify the impact that the existence of any untreated physical disorder has on your participation with your Recovery-based support system.
- 8) Identify the impact that the existence of any untreated physical disorder has on your spiritual practice.
- 9) Identify how the continued existence of any untreated physical disorder may activate the process of relapse.
- 10) Apply steps #3 through #9 of this exercise to the emotional disorders identified in step #2.

The fourth stressor is *neglect of self-care*. In the Twelve Step community neglect of self-care is known as HALT—Hungry—Angry—Lonely—Tired. It's critical that you make the time in your day-to-day routine to maintain your emotional and physical well-being. Closely examine the following set of questions in order to help you identify those areas of your life that require your self-care and the impact that neglecting your self-care will have on your ability to remain abstinent.

Pathfinder's Compass

Negligence of physical well-being.

- 1) Identify what about your sleeping habits sabotages your physical well-being.
- 2) Identify what about your eating habits sabotages your physical well-being.
- 3) Identify what about your exercise habits sabotages your physical well-being.
- 4) Identify what about your ingestion of any chemical such as caffeine, nicotine, and/or sugar sabotages your physical well-being.
- 5) Identify what about the imbalances that exist in any of your day-to-day activities sabotages your physical well-being.
- 6) Identify the impact that the problematic sleeping habits that you identified in step #1 has on your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.
- 7) Identify the impact that the problematic sleeping habits that you identified in step #1 of this exercise has on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 8) Identify the impact that the problematic sleeping habits identified in step #1 has on your self-esteem.
- 9) Identify the impact that the problematic sleeping habits that you identified in step #1 has on your relationships with your friends and family.
- 10) Identify the impact that the problematic sleeping habits that you identified in step #1 has on your participation with your Recovery-based support system.
- 11) Identify the impact that the problematic sleeping habits that you identified in step #1 has on your

spiritual practice.

- 12) Identify how the continued presence of your problematic sleeping habits without taking any action to eliminate the presence of the problematic sleeping habits and alleviating the impact of the problematic sleeping habits may activate the process of relapse.
- 13) Apply steps #6 through #12 to the answers identified in steps #2, #3, #4, and #5.

The fifth stressor is *stress*. Stress leads to you feeling overwhelmed. When you feel overwhelmed, you'll naturally seek relief. When you need to alleviate the sense of feeling overwhelmed, you're vulnerable to using self-sabotaging coping mechanisms. Your use of self-sabotaging coping mechanisms can lead to the process of relapse being activated and to eventual relapse.

The most important aspect of stress management is identifying potential stressors before they're activated and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that they don't become activated. Use the questions below to help you identify those people and events that have the potential to activate the process of relapse.

Pathfinder's Compass

Continued exposure to overwhelming people, events, and/or circumstances without eliminating the stressor and alleviating the discomfort caused by the stressor.

- 1) Identify at least three current circumstances in your life that are overwhelming you and may sabotage your Recovery.

- 2) Identify at least three people in your life today that are overwhelming you and may sabotage your Recovery.
- 3) Identify at least three current events that you must participate in that may be overwhelming to you and may sabotage your Recovery.
- 4) Identify the impact that your continued exposure to each circumstance identified in step #1 of this exercise has on your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.
- 5) Identify the impact that your continued exposure to each circumstance identified in step #1 has on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 6) Identify the impact that your continued exposure to each circumstance identified in step #1 has on your relationship with your friends and family.
- 7) Identify the impact that your continued exposure to each circumstance identified in step #1 has on your participation with your Recovery-based support system.
- 8) Identify the impact that your continued exposure to each circumstance identified in step #1 has on your spiritual practice.
- 9) Identify how your continued exposure to the circumstance identified in step #1 without taking some action to eliminate the stressor and/or alleviate the discomfort caused by the stressor may activate the process of relapse.
- 10) Apply steps #4 through #9 to those people identified in step #2.
- 11) Apply steps #4 through #9 to those events identified in step #3.

The sixth stressor is *Post Acute Withdrawal (PAW) symptoms*. PAW symptoms are long-term withdrawal symptoms that occur as a result of the damage done to your body from your chronic consumption of alcohol and other drugs as well as the aftereffects of your body adjusting to being free of alcohol and other drugs.

PAW symptoms are stress sensitive. As a result, the better able you are to reduce the levels of stress that you encounter, the better able you will be to both minimize and manage the onset of PAW symptoms. Being rested, relaxed, well fed, and connected to the people in your life will lower your stress thus making you less vulnerable to PAW symptoms. You'll likely think more clearly, more easily recall information, and feel less emotionally overwhelmed and reactive. It's only when you allow yourself to get run down or are unable to accurately assess a given situation and react inappropriately to a given situation that you may notice yourself getting into trouble. When this occurs, your ability to think clearly declines. You may be unable to recall information that could help you cope with the difficulty that the situation is presenting to you. You may be unable to control your emotional reaction to the situation, all of which compounds your original sense of stress that was activated by the situation.

Pathfinder's Compass

Negligent management of

Post Acute Withdrawal (PAW) Symptoms

- 1) PAW symptoms occur as a result of both the damage done to your body as a result of your chronic consumption of alcohol and other drugs as well as

the aftereffects of your body adjusting to being free of all mood-altering substances.

- 2) PAW symptoms are: a) An inability to think clearly, b) Memory problems, c) Stress sensitivity, d) Sleep disturbances, e) Emotional overreactions or numbness, f) Problems with physical coordination.
- 3) PAW symptoms are activated by the stress caused by being abstinent.
- 4) PAW symptoms are activated by the stress caused by your body adjusting to being abstinent.
- 5) PAW symptoms are activated by feeling overwhelmed by the day-to-day stressors in your life.
- 6) PAW symptoms are activated by the stress caused by insufficient rest.
- 7) PAW symptoms are activated by the stress caused by insufficient eating.
- 8) PAW symptoms are activated by the stress caused by insufficient self-care.
- 9) PAW symptoms are activated by insufficient stress management.
- 10) PAW symptoms are activated by insufficient management of your emotions.

It seems like common sense—eat, sleep, exercise, go to the doctor, follow your doctor's directions, don't drink nor drug, and don't do other behaviors to excess. But how willingly do you comply with the regimen? It's a regimen that could save your life so it's a regimen worth maintaining. Use the following Pathfinder's Checklist as a reference for what you should be mindful of when creating a relapse prevention plan. Although, taking care of yourself may initially strike you as a lot of work, within a

very short period of time, managing those stressors that can adversely affect your physical well-being can become second nature.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Stressors that can adversely affect your physical well-being.

- 1) Acute withdrawal symptoms
- 2) Anxiety
- 3) Chronic physical pain
- 4) Compulsive behaviors
- 5) Cravings
- 6) Fatigue
- 7) Hunger
- 8) Insufficient or excessive exercise
- 9) Melancholy
- 10) Not remaining abstinent from ALL compulsive behaviors.
- 11) Not remaining abstinent from ALL mood-altering substances.
- 12) Poor nutrition
- 13) Post Acute Withdrawal (PAW) symptoms
- 14) Sexual dysfunction
- 15) Stress