

Chapter 2

How to Maintain
Your Physical Well-being

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The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.

-Buddha

"A little reefer now and then won't hurt. After all, Jack Daniels and blow were what I had problems with." Yea, I've gained some weight. Since I got clean, I haven't been able to control my eating." "Yea, I've been sick all winter but I'm always sick in the winter." "I eat when I can. I don't have time to shop for food and then go home and cook it." "Stress management? The thought of having to do one more thing stresses me out." "Take care of myself? I've never felt good enough about myself to take care of myself."

I'm sure you've said it all before yourself. It's hard to come to terms with just how much work is involved with taking care of yourself. There's much that you have to give-up. There's much that you have to do differently. Making yourself a priority? Well, that must seem like an impossibility. After all you've spent a lifetime placing the consumption of alcohol and other drugs above all else.

So it's not hard to imagine just how foreign it must seem to you to now make your physical well-being a number one priority. But that's what you must do. I can't overstate just how important doing all the things suggested to you in this chapter is. Don't question it. Don't roll your eyes. Don't put it off till tomorrow. Just do it! Do it now! Do it tomorrow! Do it next week!

The first building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle is your physical well-being. There are five elements that make up this building block.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Five elements of the physical well-being building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle.

- 1) Abstinence from ALL alcohol and other drugs

- 2) Abstinence from ALL compulsive behaviors
- 3) Self-care
- 4) Stress Management
- 5) Prevention and/or elimination of the onset of Post Acute Withdrawal (PAW) symptoms

The first element of the physical well-being building block is *abstinence from ALL alcohol and other drugs*. Chemical dependency is a primary, chronic, progressive, prone to relapse, and often times fatal disease. Chemical dependency develops over a period of time, in part, because your body adapts to the chronic presence of alcohol and other drugs in your blood stream. As your body adapts to the ever-increasing presence of alcohol and other drugs in your blood stream, a phenomena known as *tolerance* occurs. As your body develops tolerance for the presence of alcohol and other drugs, you need to consume more quantities of alcohol and other drugs in order to achieve the desired effect that you seek to experience.

As the cycle of consuming alcohol and other drugs becomes more and more habituated by your development of increased tolerance, another phenomena, *withdrawal symptoms*, occur. Withdrawal symptoms are a set of symptoms that you may experience when you suddenly stop consuming alcohol and other drugs for a period of time. Withdrawal symptoms occur when the amount of alcohol and other drugs in your blood stream drops below the amount that your body has adapted to having in your blood stream. These symptoms typically present themselves within 6-48 hours after the last time you consumed alcohol and other drugs.

Once you experience withdrawal symptoms, not only

will you consume more and more alcohol and other drugs because of increased tolerance, you'll consume alcohol and other drugs with greater frequency in order to avoid experiencing withdrawal symptoms. It's these physiological reactions, tolerance and withdrawal symptoms, to the chronic, habituated consumption of alcohol and other drugs that causes the phenomena, *loss of control*.

Because loss of control over your consumption of alcohol and other drugs is the biological basis for your unmanageable using-based lifestyle, there's only one course of action for restoring manageability as you [re]construct a Recovery-based lifestyle. That action is short, sweet, and to the point—*abstinence from ALL alcohol and other drugs*. There's no wiggle room here, no *yea but's*, no *what if's*, no *how about's*—no room for discussion. Case closed! It's black and white. Very little needs to be said beyond the simple assertion that abstinence from your drug(s) of choice while continuing to consume *other* alcohol and other drugs is not abstinence, nor the basis upon which you can build a Recovery-based lifestyle singularly characterized by manageability.

Pathfinder's Compass

*Do I need to remain abstinent from
ALL alcohol and other drugs?*

- 1) My name is _____. I am a _____.
- 2) Write about or discuss in detail the impact your consumption of alcohol and other drugs has had on your emotional, physical, interpersonal, and spiritual well-being.
- 3) Write about or discuss in detail which alcohol and

other drugs you've used and for how long you've used each of them.

- 4) Write about or discuss in detail whether your consumption of alcohol and other drugs has decreased, remained the same, or increased over time. Trace the history for each alcohol and other drug consumed.
- 5) Write about or discuss in detail how your ability to control how much alcohol and other drugs you've consumed has either increased, remained the same, or diminished over time. Trace the history for each alcohol and other drug consumed.
- 6) Write about or discuss in detail your past experiences with quitting your consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Trace the history for each alcohol and other drug consumed.
- 7) Write about or discuss in detail what you've experienced emotionally and physically when you've gone for periods of time without consuming alcohol and other drugs. Trace the history for each alcohol and other drug consumed.
- 8) Write about or discuss in detail what your previous attempts at quitting your consumption of alcohol and other drugs has taught you about your relationship with alcohol and other drugs. Trace the history for each alcohol and other drug consumed.
- 9) Write about or discuss in detail what you imagine would happen if you tried to *use socially* or otherwise *control* your consumption of alcohol and other drugs for the next ninety days. Trace the history of any attempts of *social use* or *controlled use* for each alcohol and other drugs consumed.

- 10) Write about or discuss in detail the impact that switching from your drug(s) of choice to consuming *other* alcohol and other drugs might have on your Recovery-based lifestyle. Trace the history for each alcohol and other drug you've used when attempting to quit using your drug(s) of choice.

The second element of the physical well-being building block is *abstinence from all compulsive behaviors*. Often times, people's relationship with compulsive behaviors mimics their relationship with alcohol and other drugs—loss of control, powerlessness, unmanageability, willfulness, and preoccupation with the compulsive behavior are but a few dynamics that compulsive behaviors may share in common with your consumption of alcohol and other drugs. As a result, you may experience an activation or escalation of compulsive behaviors once you abstain from alcohol and other drugs.

It's critical that you be mindful of your relationship with behaviors that may cross the line from normal day-to-day activities to out of control compulsive activities that consume more and more of your attention and energy. Simply, abstaining from alcohol and other drugs but at the same time activating and/or escalating other compulsive behaviors may eventually activate the process of relapse.

What are compulsive behaviors? They are behaviors you do to excess. But much more than behaviors that you do to excess, they're behaviors where you experience loss of control, powerlessness, unmanageability, an excessive reliance on your will, and/or an excessive or obsessive preoccupation with the behavior. Compulsive behaviors serve as a means by which you self-soothe, medicate feel-

ings, numb-out, shut-down, get away from, release pent-up tension, and/or unleash your willfulness. Compulsive behaviors can be just as damaging to a Recovery-based lifestyle as consuming alcohol and other drugs. Once you stop consuming alcohol and other drugs, relationships, eating disorders, compulsive exercising, gambling, internet activity, sexing, shopping, and/or working are but a few examples of behaviors that you may potentially become involved with in a manner that replicates your relationship with alcohol and other drugs.

Pathfinder's Compass

- 1) Identify your behaviors that are compulsive.
- 2) Identify how your compulsive behaviors identified above replicate and/or replace your relationship with alcohol and other drugs (loss of control, excessive preoccupation, powerlessness, unmanageability).
- 3) Identify what impact those compulsive behaviors have on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 4) Identify the emotions that your compulsive behaviors *medicate*.
- 5) Identify the life circumstances you're *avoiding* by participating in your compulsive behaviors.
- 6) Identify the hurt within you that your compulsive behaviors *soothe*.
- 7) Identify how your compulsive behaviors *fill the emptiness* you experience.
- 8) Identify actions you can take in order to participate in the compulsive behaviors in less excessive ways.
- 9) Identify how you can lessen the degree of excess in

your compulsive behaviors with fellowshiping and spiritual practice.

The third element of the physical well-being building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle is *self-care*. Self-care is critical to the preservation of a Recovery-based lifestyle because proper self-care minimizes or prevents altogether physical stressors from being activated. The more you minimize the activation of physical stressors, the better able you'll be to preserve your Recovery-based lifestyle.

Where once you had little regard for the consequences to your health and well-being as a result of your alcohol and other drug use, healing as well as maintaining your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being should be the central focus of a Recovery-based lifestyle. In practical terms, this means:

- 1) Receiving treatment for any pre-existing and/or co-existing physical disorder(s).
- 2) Receiving treatment for any pre-existing and/or co-existing emotional disorder(s).
- 3) Receiving treatment for any pre-existing and/or co-existing dental problems.
- 4) Receiving information and developing a food plan for proper nutritional eating.

Self-care means maintaining the health and well-being of your body. Here's a list of ways that you can maintain your health by eating properly.

- 1) Teach yourself to notice when you're hungry.
- 2) Teach yourself to eat only when you experience hunger pains.
- 3) Discipline yourself to eat at regular times throughout the day.

- 4) Learn about nutrition—know what foods to include in your food plan and what foods to eliminate.

Besides eating properly, develop a regular pattern of sleep that enables you to get a sufficient amount of rest. Develop proper sleeping habits. Learn to listen to your body. Recognize how and when your body communicates to you that you're fatigued. When this occurs, slow down, take a day off, get together with friends, have fun, or do anything you can think of to rest and restore your body.

Exercise is yet another method for maintaining your physical well-being. Develop a regular exercise regimen that enables you to participate regularly in physical activities that you enjoy. Be careful not to overdo it. Again, learn to listen to your body. Are you chronically tired from excessive exercise or other activities that require too much exertion? Are you spending too much time exercising at the expense of other activities that you need to be involved with as well? Do you have injuries that you aren't giving time to heal? As with anything else, there's a fine line between exercise that replenishes you and exercise that overly taxes you.

Finally, maintain your physical health and well-being with fun and serenity. Get involved with activities that nourish and uplift your soul. Find your passion and commit to regular involvement in activities that serve as an outlet for expressing your passion. Schedule daily quiet times. Start a meditation practice that restores a sense of balance and tranquility. Such practices are potent ways to alleviate the accumulated aches and pains that come from living life free of alcohol and other drugs.

Pathfinder's Compass

Steps for self-care

- 1) Remain abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) Remain abstinent from ALL compulsive activities.
- 3) Receive evaluation and treatment for all pre-existing and/or co-existing medical disorders.
- 4) Receive evaluation and treatment for all pre-existing and/or co-existing emotional disorders.
- 5) Receive evaluation and treatment for all co-existing and/or pre-existing dental problems.
- 6) Receive evaluation and education about nutritional needs.
- 7) Develop regular eating patterns.
- 8) Develop regular sleeping patterns.
- 9) Develop regular exercise regimen.
- 10) Develop leisure-time interests and activities.
- 11) Develop regular stress-relieving practices such as meditation, Aikido, yoga, visualization, walking, talking to supportive people.
- 12) Develop a spiritual practice.
- 13) Read materials that uplift and inspire you.

The fourth element of the physical well-being building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle is *stress management*. Stress management is critical to preserving your Recovery-based lifestyle because chronic unrelieved stress is a toxic corrosive that erodes your physical well-being over time. You can never overestimate how important it is to develop stress management skills as well as to know how to apply those skills in order to prevent and/or elim-

inate stress in your life.

Let's first discuss stress management in very general terms. The following pointers are good guidelines to follow when you're feeling overwhelmed. *Talk* to other people who are safe, supportive, and non-judgmental. Talk about what you're experiencing. Use the feedback of your Recovery-based support system as a way of gaining perspective about the stressor you're wrestling with. Use your conversations with your Recovery-based support system to get grounded in the solution rather than remain flooded in the emotions stimulated by the stressors. There's simply no better antidote for feeling overwhelmed, for feeling lost and confused, for feeling flooded with fear and self-doubt than to experience the support of somebody who not only cares but who *has been there and done that* a few hundred times themselves.

Unburden yourself! Get it all out of you. Blow out all that you're wrestling with. Let go of the feelings that you've squirreled away. Don't worry about whether or not your feelings are rational. Just know that it's your duty to unload whatever is stored up inside of you.

Get grounded in reality. Check things out with another person(s). Allow people who know you to give you feedback about where you're at and what you're wrestling with. Accept that you're vulnerable to your perceptions being skewed by fear, shame, self-doubt, and/or a strong desire to use again.

Don't let a problem fester. Problem solve with people that you trust. Identify concrete specific actions that you can take to resolve the situation that's creating stress.

Learn from the situation. Retrace your steps. At what point did you become overwhelmed? What action or

inaction contributed to the situation getting out of control? Why did you take the action(s) that led to your feeling overwhelmed? Why did you not take an action(s) that would have lessened the stress of the situation? What can you do now to rectify the current situation?

Effective stress management begins with preparation. Identify ahead of time those people, events, and circumstances that you experience as stressful. Identifying what stresses you out is a good start but not enough in and of itself. In addition to identifying what your stressors are you need a game plan in place for how to avoid those stressors as well as what you can do when you encounter those stressors. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to *plan ahead*. Know what your plan of action should be when you encounter a stressful situation. Don't wait till you've been thrown for a loop and then scramble to regain your emotional balance. Know ahead of time exactly what you need to do! To help you strategize, try the following inventory.

Pathfinder's Compass

How to manage potential stressors.

- 1) Identify people and situations that are *stressful*.
- 2) Identify people and situations that *overwhelm* you emotionally.
- 3) Identify people and situations that make you feel *powerless*.
- 4) Identify people and situations that make you feel *helpless*.
- 5) Identify people and situations that make you feel *resentful and angry*.

- 6) Identify people and situations that make you feel *out of control*.
- 7) Identify people and situations that make you feel *afraid*.
- 8) Identify people and situations that make you feel *inadequate*.
- 9) Identify people and situations that make you feel *anxious*.
- 10) Identify people and situations that make you feel *depressed*.
- 11) Identify people and situations that make you feel unable to respond in a *self-protective way*.
- 12) Identify people and situations whose presence you cope with in *self-defeating ways*.
- 13) Develop a plan of *action* that can *minimize* the onset of each identified stressor in steps #1 through #12 of this exercise.
- 14) Develop a plan of *action* that can *eliminate* the *presence* of each stressor identified in steps #1 through #12 of this exercise in the event that one should be activated.
- 15) Develop a plan of action that can *alleviate* the *effect* of each stressor identified in steps #1 through #12 of this exercise in the event that one should be activated.
- 16) Develop a plan of *action* that identifies specific people in your Recovery-based support system that you can reach out to for help and support when you're feeling overwhelmed.
- 17) Develop a plan of *action* that identifies specific places you can go to for help and support when you're feeling overwhelmed.

Remember, no matter how hard you work at controlling the onset of stress, you'll inevitably feel overwhelmed. Don't panic. Don't make yourself out to be wrong. Stress is an inevitable by-product of living a Recovery-based lifestyle. Once you notice you're feeling overwhelmed, it only means that it's time for you to go into action in order to minimize the impact and shorten the duration of the stress that you're experiencing.

The fifth element of the physical well-being building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle is the *prevention and elimination of the onset of 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. Examples of PAW symptoms are:

- 1) An inability to think clearly
- 2) Memory problems
- 3) Stress sensitivity
- 4) Sleep disturbances
- 5) Emotional overreactions or numbness
- 6) Problems with physical coordination

PAW symptoms can interfere with or hinder altogether your ability to successfully complete the seemingly simple tasks involved with maintaining your Recovery-based lifestyle. Your inability to solve the simple life problems can lead to frustration, discouragement, a diminished sense of well-being, and ultimately giving up on constructing and preserving a Recovery-based lifestyle. After all, why go to the trouble of constructing a Recovery-based lifestyle if life is still going to be a struggle? Since

it's critical that you understand the influence that PAW symptoms exert on your day-to-day functioning, let's take a moment and review what the PAW symptoms are.

The first PAW symptom is an *inability to think clearly*. Although your intelligence is not affected by Post Acute Withdrawal symptoms, your ability to concentrate for any period of time beyond a few minutes can be adversely affected. When your ability to think clearly is compromised, your ability to perform abstract reasoning is impaired. Because this PAW symptom affects your ability to concentrate, it hinders your ability to deal with abstract thoughts. This makes learning how to remain abstinent difficult as well as successfully executing what you need to do to remain abstinent.

The second PAW symptom is *impaired memory*. Perhaps you've experienced times when you were told something only to be unable to recall what you were told minutes later. You may also notice that stress clouds your memory to the point where you can't recall significant events from your past. In such a situation, it's not that the memories have decayed to the point that there's no memory to access. Rather, the stress of a situation combined with the effect of PAW may impair your ability to access that memory.

It's not hard to imagine how PAW's influence on both your thinking and memory might affect your ability to learn new Recovery-based skills, recall significant aspects of your using history, and/or access information necessary for making Recovery-based choices in times of crisis.

The third PAW symptom is an *impaired ability to properly assess and/or manage stress*. As a result, you may

discover that you have difficulty distinguishing a high stress situation from a low stress situation. Your inability to make such distinctions may cause you to become easily confused and overwhelmed by a situation. As a result, you may find yourself often times overreacting or reacting in an inappropriate manner to a given situation. Because relapse prevention is so dependent on your ability to accurately assess a circumstance and respond appropriately, it's easy to see how this PAW symptom could endanger your abstinence.

Not only does stress sensitivity make you vulnerable to relapse, it exacerbates the other symptoms of PAW as well. The more elevated your stress is, the worse your experience of PAW will be. An elevated sense of stress will intensify other PAW symptoms. This can only intensify your sense of stress, which can only intensify other symptoms of PAW and so on and so on.

The fourth PAW symptom is *sleep disturbance*. Most people who are newly abstinent from alcohol and other drugs experience sleep disturbance. For some, it is temporary, for others it can be a life-long problem. Because chronic fatigue can be a danger to your ability to remain abstinent, you must remain vigilant to how your sleeping habits may jeopardize your long-term abstinence.

The fifth PAW symptom is *impairment of one's physical coordination*. This symptom may manifest itself as dizziness, a difficulty with balance, problems with eye and hand coordination, and slow reflexes. These symptoms can create the appearance of clumsiness or make it seem that you are accident-prone. These symptoms can make it difficult for you to perform simple tasks, often times to the point of being debilitating.

The sixth PAW symptom is *emotional overreaction or emotional shutting down*. You may have noticed that your emotional reaction to different situations often times has been out of proportion to what actually occurred. You may notice yourself feeling more than you ever have felt before—more angry, anxious, fearful, resentful, or ashamed. Once your feelings become inflamed and perhaps out of control, you respond to this overreactivity by emotionally shutting down altogether. Once this happens, you don't feel anything. You may begin to question why you're having no emotional reaction to the events and circumstances of your life. Where just the other day you found yourself overreacting, now you have no reaction whatsoever. This phenomena accounts for much of the mood swings you may find yourself experiencing. As a result, you may think of yourself as being moody or even going crazy rather than recognize that your mood swings may be a PAW symptom.

When a PAW symptom(s) occurs, you may find yourself feeling powerless and impotent. You may conclude that you're going a little crazy. It's important to understand that your inability to focus and concentrate, your difficulty remembering things that seemingly should be second nature to you, or your overreaction to situations that you once could handle with both arms tied behind your back are all normal Recovery-based symptoms.

Pathfinder's Compass

How to minimize and manage the onset of Post Acute Withdrawal symptoms.

- 1) Create a plan of action for how to stabilize yourself

once you experience an activated PAW symptom(s). Know precisely what to do and not to do, who to contact and who to avoid, where to go and not to go.

- 2) Post your plan in places that you can easily retrieve the plan once you need it. Follow the plan once you're aware of the presence of an activated PAW symptom.
- 3) Learn as much as you can about how to manage stressful people and situations as well as how to alleviate stress once you're experiencing it.
- 4) Proper eating is an effective way to minimize the onset of PAW symptoms.
- 5) Rest and relaxation are effective ways to minimize the onset of PAW symptoms.
- 6) Maintaining a balanced lifestyle that keeps you from becoming chronically fatigued and emotionally overwhelmed.

Much of what I've discussed in this chapter may seem to be nothing more than common sense. And it is. However, in reading this material, you may have discovered just how badly you've let yourself go over the years as more and more of your life became consumed by your consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Believe me, taking care of yourself is actually much more difficult to do than you would think. But taking care of yourself is what you must be willing to do—first and foremost. Don't dismiss anything in this chapter because it seems too simplistic or too much bother. To do so is to put you and your abstinence at great risk.