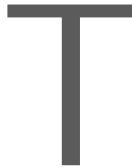


Chapter 3

*R*ecovery: The Path to Sobriety



*In the end, it's not the years in your life that count.
It's the life in your years.*

-Abraham Lincoln

Very few people accept overnight that they're addicted to alcohol and other drugs. It's likely you've been going back and forth on the question for a while. Thoughts such as the following may have come to mind:

- 1) I'm not really that bad. Look at how much other people drink.
- 2) I'm not sure I really want to do this. After all, what happens if I can't quit?
- 3) I've been drinking for so long. What will life be like without alcohol?
- 4) I'll try to cut back and see how that goes.
- 5) There must be some easier way of doing this than quitting altogether.

Here's the truth of the matter. There's no magic bullet to managing the disease of chemical dependency. You must be willing to explore your use of alcohol and other drugs and to acknowledge the impact alcohol and other drugs has had on your life.

If you've decided that you would like to stop drinking and drugging but are unable to do so, then how can you be helped? There's a process that millions of people just like you use called *Recovery*. Recovery empowers you to achieve and maintain abstinence and make personal changes in your life.

Recovery is a process of transformation that requires abstinence from all mood-altering substances. It is a process of personal growth that emphasizes restoration of your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

Recovery begins first and foremost with abstinence. You must first remain abstinent from alcohol and **all** other drugs. As you undergo your first few days of abstinence you'll need to cope with the symptoms that present

themselves when your body is detoxifying. It's likely that you will experience symptoms as your body adapts to being free of alcohol and other drugs. We refer to these as withdrawal symptoms. For some, withdrawal can be mild if noticeable at all. For others, symptoms of withdrawal can be quite severe—sometimes even fatal. I highly recommend that you first consult a qualified health care provider who is familiar with alcohol and other drugs detoxification before quitting on your own.

Medications can be prescribed by your physician to moderate the discomfort and severity of your withdrawal symptoms. Once stabilized from detoxification, you can start the long-term work involved with maintaining abstinence.

The long-term work starts with your own admission that you're *powerless* over alcohol and other drugs—meaning that your ability to control your consumption of alcohol and other drugs is impaired. Because of this you must commit to building a life that's free of all mood-altering substances.

Although it's necessary to acknowledge your powerlessness, such an admission is not only difficult to make, it's difficult to embrace and maintain for any period of time. But it's necessary to acknowledge and continually embrace your powerlessness. Until you truly accept your inability to control your use of alcohol and other drugs, you'll always maintain the belief that you can control your use of alcohol and other drugs, and you'll maintain the desire to prove it to yourself and others.

Acknowledging that you're powerless must be integrated with the understanding that you have a chronic disease that *will not go away*. You're not only powerless

over your use of alcohol and other drugs today, but you're going to be powerless forever.

In accepting that your disease is chronic, you're accepting that the physiological basis of your disease is the neurochemistry of your brain and the adaptations that your body has made to your consumption of alcohol and other drugs—not weakness of character, lack of willpower, moral depravity, or possession of a specific personality trait.

Understanding that your body processes alcohol and other drugs in a way that has caused chemical dependency, you need to know that your disease is highly treatable and manageable but not reversible. If you don't properly manage your disease, no matter your intentions, you're much more vulnerable to relapse and remaining active in your disease.

You can't effectively manage your disease without making changes in your lifestyle. For most, lifestyle changes prove to be the most difficult part of Recovery. Some of the changes most people make are listed here.

Pathfinder's Checklist



*Helpful lifestyle changes for managing
the disease of chemical dependency.*

- 1) Attending support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.
- 2) Avoiding places where you used to drink and drug.
- 3) Breaking off contact with people with whom you

drank and drugged.

- 4) Keeping your home free of alcohol and other drugs.

As you awaken to how out of control your life has become, you'll realize just how much your alcohol and other drug use has ruled your life. Because of your preoccupation with consuming these chemicals, you most likely don't possess the skills necessary to live without them. Because of these deficits in your life skills, initially you'll need to rely on others for help. You can use other people as a sounding board when your thoughts and emotions overwhelm you. People will serve as sobriety mentors—teaching you how to solve the many problems that life without alcohol and other drugs presents. You can learn by listening. Other people's stories provide new ways to cope with your own life challenges.

You know the old saying, *Rome wasn't built in a day*. Well, the same goes for Recovery. Lowered expectations, patience, and persistence will take you a long way. There's much about your life you want to change, and you want to change quickly. But it doesn't happen like that. Recovery has its own timetable that will seldom be in sync with your personal timetable.

Try to remember that Recovery is a process, not a destination. Your unmet expectations will be a source of frustration. The feelings provoked by your frustration with the pace of Recovery will make you vulnerable to relapse. The only way to protect yourself from the frustration of unmet expectations and uneven progress is by developing an attitude of patience and acceptance.

You may question whether you have a problem with alcohol and other drugs. You may doubt that Recovery is

the answer for you. Whether you're feeling pressured to address the issues you might have with alcohol and other drug use, or whether it's beginning to dawn on you that there is a problem, do yourself a favor. Remain open minded. Be willing to listen and explore honestly your consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Know that there is a solution for whatever you might discover.