

## Recovery Overview

As you learn about substance use disorders and how to treat them, you will probably hear the phrase "being in recovery."

### What happens to the person with the addiction in recovery?

Recovery occurs over time — it is not a single moment in time. It is a constantly evolving period that requires work to maintain. Recovery is a new beginning, and can be a time of great personal fulfillment and growth for people in recovery and their families. Signs of increasing health and wellness are that the person with the addiction improves physically and emotionally and in his or her relationship with others.

Some addiction experts use the term "recovering" rather than "recovered." Although the person has made a commitment to abstinence and is moving in that direction, he or she continues to be vulnerable to relapse. Recovery requires sustained effort — so some view it as if the work of recovery is never fully done, so they use the word "recovering." Recovery requires that the person with the addiction repair relationships damaged through years of drinking and taking drugs. There may be feelings of shame and self-hatred. The person may have to give up the "addict mentality" that is suspicious, secretive, manipulative, and self-centered.

People in recovery abstain from substance use. By doing so, they regain their physical health and emotional well-being. Once again, they are able to enjoy everyday activities with energy, enthusiasm, optimism, and confidence. Over time, people will return to being more loving spouses, happier kids, effective parents, good neighbors, and dedicated employees.

### Recovering or Recovered?

People who are in recovery have overcome the problems associated with their substance use. People do not have to be in the addiction stage of substance use to enter and appreciate recovery, and they don't have to enter a formal treatment program or attend a self-help group — they may have simply had a conversation with a family member and decided it was time to cut back on drinking or drug taking.

### Relapsing

This time can also be challenging. People in recovery may feel shame or self-hatred. They might have to give up an "addict mentality" that is suspicious, secretive, manipulative, and self-centered. They may have to repair relationships damaged through years of substance use. Intense, painful memories and feelings stemming from anxiety, depression, school problems, sexual problems, neglect, loss, violence or other past trauma may come flooding back at unexpected times. With emotions already raw, the stresses and disappointments of daily living can feel intolerable. In the past, alcohol and drugs had provided relief from problems and trauma, but the recovering person now has to face these feelings with no "escape hatch."

**Even though the person is in recovery, relapse is a common reaction to this stress.**

Sometimes relapse occurs when the person is doing well with their recovery. He or she feels healthy, confident, and/or "cured" and believes that he or she is ready to go back to casual, regular or "controlled" use of alcohol or drugs. The person may remember the honeymoon period of their use (even though it may have been long ago) — where his or her use didn't cause problems — and may want to return to that place. But this is often impossible since addiction changes the physical makeup of the brain and therefore the person in recovery is not able to use drugs or alcohol in a controlled fashion.

### **Getting Help During Recovery**

Medical professionals, particularly those who specialize in substance use disorders, are an extremely important asset during a time of relapse. They can help the person learn techniques for containing feelings, focusing on the present, and making use of support from others. Relying on group support from Twelve Step programs, engaging in prayer or meditation, and finding other ways to stay on an even keel can also be extremely helpful.