

Wellness: The Missing Dimension in Recovery

As you may be aware, you are not the only one who has ever hidden empty wine bottles from your spouse, missed out on a good job due to failing a drug screening or fallen into a pattern of constantly covering up for the irresponsible behavior of an alcoholic spouse or partner. An estimated 5 to 10 percent of Americans are addicted to alcohol and/or other drugs, and patterns of multiple substance abuse are now the norm. Untreated chemical dependency is a major contributing factor to child and spousal abuse, family breakups, unemployment and traffic fatalities—the leading cause of death for people under age twenty-five.

Unfortunately, alcoholics and addicts whose diseases go untreated also eventually suffer major health consequences—including severe damage to their livers, hearts and other vital

organs—and often die decades before their time. What you may not be aware of is the fact that millions of people in recovery—perhaps the majority—also shortchange themselves of years of joyful living as a direct result of nicotine addiction, compulsive overeating, junk food addiction and/or other self-destructive behaviors they carry with them into recovery. If you are currently suffering from these or other toxic behavior patterns, you may have acquired these habits as a substitute for your primary addiction to drugs and alcohol. Fortunately, you can free yourself from this vicious cycle—and this book will show you how.

Like most people recovering from addictive disorders, you will need to focus your energy and be disciplined about repairing the damage that years of excessive drinking and drugging have done to your body. As part of a holistic approach to recovery, you must also work on releasing the “baggage” associated with self-defeating mind-sets and behaviors. Instead, you will need to replace that baggage with a life-affirming belief system and a health-conducive lifestyle that fully support your goals in recovery. The good news is that embracing a wellness-oriented lifestyle and working your recovery program go hand in hand.

In his classic bestseller *Positive Addiction*, psychiatrist William Glasser expounds on the benefits associated with replacing negative addictions, or ingrained self-destructive behaviors, with “positive addictions.” Examples of positive addictions include regular physical exercise, yoga or meditation, developing an artistic talent, or pursuing a fulfilling hobby. In contrast to negative addictions, such as alcohol or drug addiction, which tend to foster unhealthy dependencies and decreased self-esteem, positive addictions contribute to improved quality of life, heightened self-esteem and increased feelings of independence. One of

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In this book, you will learn about the numerous positive addictions associated with a wellness-oriented lifestyle and how to embrace them as integral components of a truly holistic approach to recovery. Equally important, you will learn to appreciate how a healthy lifestyle can help you successfully navigate the various stages of recovery and safeguard against relapse.

The Importance of Wellness to Your Recovery

If you completed a chemical dependency treatment program, you most likely learned about the benefits of physical exercise and sound nutrition in repairing the damage done to your body by excessive use of alcohol and drugs. You probably also received an introduction to the importance of basic stress management skills in maintaining day-to-day sobriety and guarding against relapse.

Primary treatment, or the initial phase of treatment, generally focuses some attention on basic wellness concepts. Unfortunately, these concepts often receive less than adequate attention during the critically important, yet oft-neglected continuing care phase of treatment. This sad state of affairs is a reflection of what I call the neglected stepchild syndrome. In today's health-care environment, with its overriding emphasis on cost containment, mental health services have become the neglected stepchild of medical care. Chemical dependency treatment has become the

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neglected stepchild of mental health, and continuing care, which should form the cornerstone of ongoing recovery maintenance, tends to be severely shortchanged.

Another reason wellness lifestyles often receive less than adequate emphasis in treatment stems from the failure of many treatment professionals to take good care of themselves. Far too many treatment professionals suffer from a variety of lifestyle imbalances, including nicotine and caffeine addiction, obesity, lack of exercise and compulsive workaholism. As such, they are in a poor position to serve as role models in motivating their clients to adopt wellness-oriented lifestyles.

Yet another obstacle to living well stems from the conflicting demands and time pressures that all of us experience in today's fast-paced society. In recovery, we often feel overwhelmed by the overlapping demands of earning a living, engaging in family life, going to meetings, studying the steps and doing the million and one other things that creep into our overly crowded lives. In the context of such a pressure-cooker environment, our well-intentioned plans to launch an exercise program, bring our diet into balance, give up smoking or take up meditation all too often fail to materialize.

As you can see, many influences conspire to work against our devoting appropriate attention to living healthy during recovery. The net result is that millions of people in recovery neglect this critically important area. Predictably, they end up paying the price in terms of unwittingly setting themselves up for relapse, as well as for heart disease, emphysema, various forms of cancer and a host of other devastating illnesses that can often be prevented.

The good news is that you have a choice. In many respects, by virtue of demonstrating the courage and commitment that has

taken you this far in working your recovery program, you have a leg up on most Americans in terms of embracing a healthy lifestyle. Just as you have learned to work your core recovery program step by step, you can likewise learn to embrace a wellness-oriented lifestyle and effectively integrate it into your recovery program—simply by taking “one step at a time.”

Wellness Defined

Wellness can be defined as the dynamic process of taking charge of your health and programming yourself to attain optimal health and well-being. As this book demonstrates, you are in the driver's seat. You set your own goals and priorities, design and implement your wellness program, and determine how far you want to go toward claiming your birthright to optimal health, longevity and self-fulfillment.

You are about to embark on an exciting journey that will truly transform your life. In a nutshell, this book will show you how to:

- Supercharge your recovery by integrating a wellness-oriented lifestyle into your 12-step program.
- Inventory your strengths and weaknesses regarding health and wellness, with particular reference to lifestyle influences.
- Identify the wellness goals that are most important to you—including your optimum life expectancy and the immediate wellness benefits you would like to enjoy—and implement an action plan for achieving these goals.
- Launch your personal quest for uncovering and expressing your unique sense of purpose in life—zeroing in on those

core values and goals that are truly important to you—and channeling your focused energy into transforming your dreams into reality.

- Gain increased self-esteem, energy, alertness and confidence as you pursue your pathway to greater health.
- Learn how taking care of yourself will enable you to give much more to your friends, family and other people in recovery!

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