

WHAT CAN I DO?

Begin your own program by taking Step One from the previous chapter "How It Works." When we fully concede to our innermost selves that we are powerless over our addiction, we have taken a big step in our recovery. Many of us have had some reservations at this point, so give yourself a break and be as thorough as possible at the start. Go to Step Two, and so forth and as you go on you will come to an understanding of the program for yourself. If you are in an institution of any kind, you have gone through complete withdrawal and have stopped using for the present. Now, with a clear mind, try this way of life.

Upon release, continue your daily program and contact a member of N.A. Do this by mail, by phone, or in person. Better yet come to our meetings. Here you will find the answers to some of the things that may be disturbing you now.

If you are not in an institution, the same holds true. Stop using for today. Most of us can do for eight or twelve hours what seems impossible for a longer period of time. If the obsession or compulsion becomes too great, put yourself on a five minute basis of not using. Minutes will grow to hours and hours to days and so you will break the habit and gain some peace of mind. The real miracle happens when you realize that the need for drugs has in some way been lifted from you. You have stopped using and have started to live.

It all began with that first admission and surrender. From that point, each addict is reminded that a day clean is a day won. At first we can do little more than attend meetings. Probably we cannot remember even a single name or word or thought from our first meeting. What we do remember is the feelings we get and every human being craves, the feeling that we belong someplace, that no matter what we have done or what course our addiction has taken, we can relax and enjoy the love that fills the room at every meeting.

Meetings strengthened our grip on cleanliness. When we first started, we used to go only once in a while and find excuses not to go. We were frightened because we did not know anyone. We used to think that we did not need meetings. Then, when things would go wrong, we would make a meeting. Going to meetings regularly we learned that there was no need to fear. We have learned that we are always welcome.

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Having begun attending meetings regularly, we were introduced to the Twelve Steps. Working the steps got us out of our losing set-ups. When we admitted that our lives had become unmanageable, we didn't have to argue our point of view. We didn't have to be right all of the time. We could relax and give others the right to be wrong. We found a new source of energy to put to work in ordering the wreckage of our lives. Things that we have done to protect our illness no longer seem worth it; and we were free to open our minds to new ideas. Defected behavior could be corrected as soon as we loosened our grip on our old ways. We found that the fear of change was replaced by a sense of wonder and adventure.

Freedom from these defects and from covering up the wreckage of the past has been the main stumbling block in relating to others. By recognizing the defects in our lives and letting go and letting God, we were ready to have sanity restored to us. In applying these spiritual principles to our lives, we should keep an open mind. Patience, humility, and tolerance are well worth any price that we must pay for them. It would seem that the path to spiritual recovery involves spiritual principles. Spiritual indifference will surely doom us.

As we went to meetings regularly, we also learned the basic value of talking to other addicts, who shared our problems and our goals. As we became responsible to our own recovery, we became responsible for the fellow addicts.

This responsibility was two edged, we found. The recovering addict wishes to share what he had found with another addict because he knows how important it is for one addict to talk with another addict. The other edge is our own need to preserve our own cleanliness and sobriety. We found from experience that our ~~own~~ <sup>character</sup> not using is strengthened when we share it with others who may need and ask for help.

WE are constantly gaining new insights into how it works by honestly sharing with fellow members the questions we have and the solutions we have found in the program. By sharing with one another, we begin learning how to solve our problems.

Facing problems is a necessary ability to stay clean. If we have had problems in the past, it is unlikely that simple abstinence will eliminate the defence mechanisms and emotional scars that enabled us to live in the old days. Now, we have learned that we

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car and must go to our Higher Power for help solving problems. Fortunately, many problems can wait. It will help things go smoother if the newcomer finds a sponsor to confide in - someone whose judgement ~~he~~ can trust. We do not think it weak to put a little faith and trust in a person with more experience in the program.

As soon as we became acquainted with the fellowship and the basic ideas of the program, we began to put these ideas into action. It is a good tool to remember to counter our natural tendency to saddle ourselves down with concerns that go beyond the twenty-four hours available to each day. Living clean one day at a time will reveal to us the things that truly come from within and give us power over things that would interrupt our flow.

In our addiction, we had to fear change because we had lost control of our lives and most changes were for the worst. Clean, we had to learn to face another enemy - boredom. If we allowed ourselves to stagnate and to cling to our old ways of desperation and fear, our chances of a real and lasting recovery lessened. We had to reach out and to accept the love and understanding the program had to offer. There was special calm that came over us when we found that our disease and our problems were shared. Opportunities to share our fears and pain and to give encouragement and hope to a newcomer go hand in hand.

Guilt and worry keep us from doing the things we can do today. The denial of our disease, or reservations, keep us sick. We lack humility, clinging to old ways. These old ways have to go if we are to gain new lives. We can successfully face the days to come if we but take advantage of the program of Narcotics Anonymous. Not from preaching nor from judgment, but from sharing the experience, strength and hope do we recover. Our willingness to try out new ideas and possible solutions to problems will help open the doors to recovery. One discovery leads to another; and soon we are established in a new way of life where people, places, and things are kept in proper perspective. The old all or nothing point of view will no longer seem like a useful idea.

As we go about the task of changing our lives, we are confronted by our character defects. Letting go ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> character defects should be done with love. It is important, we think, to be gentle with ourselves when putting our ego to rest. By developing a conscious contact with a Higher Power, we can begin clearing away defects from our personalities and wrongdoings from our past, develop in

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us a capacity for trusting what is around the corner for us. This is our faith.

Obsessiveness is common to all addicts. We lost for perfection and lack the ability to give the others the right to be wrong. This is remedied as our perception is cleared up. Many differences are conciled themselves naturally. Spasms of fear and anger will become less frequent. Impossible goals will seem less attractive and our commitments will more often be confined to our capabilities. We learn to say "no" to many things and know our own minds.

Obsessions drive addicts past the normal human limits and many times wins them great fame and recognition - until they burn out. The drug induced state allows a person to exclude all the normal background awareness and focus entirely on a single point. At first this was like a handy magnifying glass used at will. Later it became a horrible sequence of all-consuming bits and pieces that rushed up continually. We found ourselves powerless and out of control. The subconscious mind is no longer free to act.

As we began to recover, problems that had no solutions became transparent and unreal in the light of our new understanding. Old ideas, grudges, and resentments faded as we loosened our sick point of view. A warm feeling of belonging replaced the emptiness in our gut. It was no accident though. Nothing is free. We paid for our recovery with our caring and our sharing.

In our lives, we face the world together. No longer do we feel backed into a corner and at the mercy of events and circumstances. We can expect to succeed in many of the areas of our lives whereas we have known only failure and despair. Our new friends and the tools for living in the program of Narcotics Anonymous will enable us to experience these changes. Working the steps will broaden our horizons and practicing the principles will reduce our commitments to some manageable level. Our new friends and awakened spirits will help us. Our common problem is addiction and our common effort is recovery.

In our cleanliness we will eventually have to learn to cope with success. Success scares us because in the past it preceded failure. We could not afford to feel good because we remembered the pain of disappointment. It was better, we concluded, to keep moving on and holding back. Actually we had a great deal of sense when we were operating. Now it makes no sense at all. The adventure and fun of life comes from getting involved and picking

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out a place to take a stand. We will make our mistakes; but we will be able to learn from them. We will experience failure; but we will learn how to succeed.

The steps will provide for our reentry into society at large. We can always find people who have had difficulties similar to our own and succeeded in some way. It is difficult to get rid of the notion that we must be great or do great to be okay. As we recover we will often find ourselves saying and doing things that suddenly make no sense to us even though we've been doing them for years. We literally see our mistakes. This is necessary in the course of the recovery process. Self-condemnation has little place here. When we see our errors, we should simply correct them or seek