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through 15 years of alcohol and prescription drug addiction, one prominent Virginia business owner tried it all to get clean: three inpatient rehab centers; talk therapy; Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), spending roughly $200,000 in the process.

“I would follow through for about a year, and then start to feel like I was on top of things and get complacent,” says the 52-year-old, who asked that her name not be used. She’d treat herself to “just one drink” and soon find herself in a familiar downward spiral. She last relapsed in October 2012. Three months later, she was on the interstate in the morning, a half-empty four-pack of mini wine bottles on her front seat, when she swerved and slammed head-on into a semi-trailer truck. She escaped her flattened car with minor head trauma, gratitude that her alcoholic father. Yet that only becomes a threat to me when I make a choice to ingest something that cuts the beast loose,” she says. “I work hard every day, using a whole bunch of different tools to keep that from happening again.”

She is one of a growing number of alcoholics and addicts reaching beyond the standard trifecta of 28-day rehabs, 12-step programs and psychotherapy toward an approach that addresses mind, body and spirit. More than 40 million Americans over the age of 12 (16 percent of the population) are addicted to alcohol or drugs, according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at New York City’s Columbia University. Yet the standard treatments yield less-than-stellar success rates.

Sixty percent of addicts return to drug use within a year after rehab, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and only 5 percent of AA attendees continue with meetings after 12 months, according to AA research. David Essel, a Fort Myers, Florida, life coach who specializes in working with substance abusers, says that when examining all the data, only about one in 10 addicts or alcoholics that use conventional means alone are still clean after one year. Fortunately, because people vary widely in emotional needs and physiologies, other complementary options are also catching on.

Mending Brain and Body
Enter a group meeting for recovering addicts or alcoholics and chances are there will be a pot of black coffee, plus donuts or cookies. “Having poor eating habits is a primary contributing factor to relapse,” says Registered Dietitian David Wiss, founder of NutritionInRecovery.com, which provides nutrition consulting for recovery programs in Los Angeles. Because substance abuse can deaden appetite and many of the same neurological circuits that drugs and alcohol stimulate are also activated by salty or sugar-laden foods, newly recovering addicts tend to be ravenous and drawn to junk food. “After 30 days in treatment, people can gain 10 to 30 pounds. They often turn back to addictive substances they’ve abused to get their appetite back under control,” says Wiss. (Because smoking deadens taste buds, drawing people to seek out more intense salty or sugary flavors, it exacerbates the problem.)

In a subconscious attempt to get maximum stimulation of now-neglected reward centers in the brain, users often eat little most of the day, then binge later, leading to erratic blood sugar levels that can impact mood, further sabotaging recovery. After years of abuse, addicts also tend to suffer deficiencies of proteins and good fats—key building blocks of a healthy brain.

“The brain has been rewired due to the use of substances. Without healing it, you can attend all the meetings in the world and you’ll still struggle with cravings,” reports Essel. He starts new clients with 500 milligrams (mg) daily of the dietary supplement DL-phenylalanine, an amino acid precursor to feel-good neurotransmitters such as norepinephrine. He also gives them tyrosine, an energizing amino acid said to quell sugar cravings. For relieving a craving in progress, he recommends 500 to 1,000 mg of glutamine, placed under the tongue.

Wiss says he generally recommends food over supplements, yet asking newly recovering addicts to also revamp their diets can be tough. “I wouldn’t expect anyone to make a big nutritional change in their first week of sobriety,” he says.
After that, he encourages small steps:
Drink eight glasses of water per day. Eat three meals and three snacks to keep blood sugar stable. Load up on fiber, which can help heal the gut and replenish it with healthy bacteria. Eat plenty of lean protein to promote production of feel-good brain chemicals. Load up on nuts, seeds, fatty fish and other omega-3 fatty acids that suppress inflammation in the brain and have been shown in some studies to quell depression.

Daily exercise is also key as Wiss notes that it “circulates our blood and gets all those healthy nutrients into our brain.”

Physical activities can also help fill the void and even provide a new sense of identity for someone whose self-esteem has been shattered, says Scott Strode, founder of Denver, Colorado’s Phoenix Multisport, which hosts group cycling, running and climbing outings for recovering addicts and alcoholics.

Strode kicked his own cocaine habit 18 years ago by immersing himself first in boxing, then climbing and triathlons. He founded Phoenix in 2007 to help fill what he sees as a gaping hole in recovery support services—a place where people with similar pasts can gather and talk without dwelling exclusively on their dependence issues. He has since served 15,000 people in Colorado, California, and Boston, offering 60 free outings a week for anyone at least 48 hours sober.

“By being part of something like this, you can let go of the shame of being the addict, the junkie or the one that let down the family. Now you are the climber or the mountain biker,” says Strode. He stresses that Phoenix programs aren’t intended to replace treatment. Still, “For some, just that redefining of self may be enough. For others, it’s a powerful tool in a broader toolbox.”

**Beyond AA**

Co-founded in 1935 by an alcoholic named Bill Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous now has 2 million members and has played an important role in many successful recoveries. However, its God-based approach (five of the 12 steps refer to God or Him), a credo that alcoholics must admit “powerlessness” and its emphasis on alcoholism as a defining disease aren’t for everyone. Naysayers point to a 2006 finding by the nonprofit Cochrane Collaboration that states, “No experimental studies unequivocally demonstrated the effectiveness of AA or 12-step approaches for reducing alcohol dependence or problems.”

Such concerns have prompted some alternative recovery fellowships, including Moderation Management (Moderation.org), which helps people that want to drink less; and Smart Recovery (SmartRecovery.org), which supports an ethos of self-empowerment via cognitive behavioral therapy, nutritional changes and group discussions. Other programs focus on renewing the soul by applying metaphysical practices to the traditional 12 steps.
“The conventional 12 steps talk about a higher power outside of you,” says Ester Nicholson, a singer, author and addictions counselor. In her book *Soul Recovery: 12 Keys to Healing Addiction*, she describes a descent into crack cocaine addiction beginning in her teens, and the long climb out of it.

At first, she says, the 12 steps helped her break free of what she calls the “spiritual malady, mental obsession and physical allergy,” that is addiction. But after a decade of being clean, followed by a near-relapse, she discovered meditation and other spiritual practices. “I realized that this higher power can restore me to sanity, but the higher power is actually within me. I found this wonderful bridge between the 12 steps and universal spiritual principals, and it is rocking my world.”

Patti Lacey, 54, an Essel client, likewise found lasting sobriety by extending her toolbox, learning to focus not only on past pain, but on bringing forth her best self. According to the International Coach Federation, which reports an uptick in interest in recovery coaching, a coach helps to establish individual goals and map a journey to success.

Two years into recovery, Lacey still takes her supplements daily, rises at dawn to meditate, attends 12-step meetings and is part of a nondenominational church community. She also regularly meets with her coach to report progress and update goals, including getting a handle on her finances, a frequent casualty of addiction. “Everybody’s journey is different,” Lacey confirms. “What I needed was someone to tell me exactly what to do in the beginning, and then be around to hold me accountable. That changed everything.”


**Complementary Healing Tools**

by Lisa Marshall

**Ear acupuncture:** Since 1974, addiction specialists have used an ear acupuncture needling protocol to ease cravings, decrease anxiety and improve sleep during withdrawal. Numerous published studies in *The Lancet*, the *Archives of Internal Medicine* and others support its efficacy. More than 1,000 U.S. programs now use it, according to the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (*AcuDetox.com*).

**Neurofeedback:** Also known as EEG biofeedback, this technique uses electroencephalography sensors attached to the head to enable someone to observe their own brain wave activity on a computer and learn to intentionally alter it via visualization and relaxation techniques (*isnr.net*).

**Aromatherapy:** Life coach David Essel recommends three aromatherapy oils to clients in recovery: lavender, a relaxant; lemon grass, for energy; and frankincense, a mood-balancer.

**Ibogaine:** This psychoactive brew derived from the West African shrub *Tabernanthe iboga* has been used ceremonially for centuries. In the 1960s, an opioid addict accidentally discovered that after experiencing an intense, four-to-eight-hour dreamlike “trip”, his cravings for heroin ceased. Deborah Mash, Ph.D., a professor of neurology and molecular and cellular pharmacology at the University of Miami, traveled to Amsterdam in the early 1990s to see if there was any truth to such cases. “I saw a man that was on heroin and cocaine and addicted to benzodiazepines undergo detox with no withdrawal signs, and in 36 hours look like a new person,” she recalls. She has been studying it ever since. The drug is believed to serve as an addiction interrupter, acting on opioid receptors in the brain to quell withdrawal symptoms. Some describe it as “resetting the brain” to a pre-addicted state.

Ibogaine is illegal in the U.S. Some offshore clinics are providing it, but Mash warns that some are unscrupulous, so buyer beware. (*ClearSkyIbogaine.com* offers medically supervised Ibogaine therapy in Cancun, Mexico).

**You are the Power.** Through my conscious union with the infinite universal presence, I am powerful, clear and free. Through the realization that God is within me, expressing as me, my life is in divine and perfect order.

**Restored to wholeness.** Through my conscious connection with the one power, I reclaim my spiritual dominion and emotional balance. I am restored to my original nature of clarity, peace and wholeness. I am restored.

**Complete surrender.** I turn my life over to the care of the God I understand, know and embody as love, harmony, peace, prosperity and joy. I know that which I am surrendering to, and I do so absolutely. Knowing that this power is the very essence of my being, I say with my whole heart and mind: Thy will be done.

**An examined life.** Through my absolute surrender and conscious connection to the one power and presence, I courageously, deeply and gently search within myself for all thought patterns and behaviors that are out of alignment with love, integrity, harmony and order.

**Living out loud.** I claim the courage and willingness to share the exact nature of my mistakes with another spiritual being. I am heard with compassion, unconditional love and wisdom. In this loving vibration, clarity, peace and balance are restored.

**Honoring the inner child.** I am now ready to release all thought patterns and behaviors unlike my true nature, which is wholeness. I free-fall into the loving presence of spirit within, and allow it to heal every known and unknown false belief. I am transformed by the renewal of my mind.

**Never give up.** In loving compassion for every aspect of my being, I humbly surrender to the love of spirit. I know myself as a perfect expression of life. I surrender all, and I am restored to the life I am created to live.

**Willingness.** I acknowledge the people I have offended based on false beliefs, fear, doubt and unworthiness. I am willing to go to any lengths to clean up my side of the street.

**Cleaning up the wreckage.** Backed by all the power of the universe, I lovingly, directly and honestly make amends in a way that supports the highest good of all concerned.

**Spiritual maintenance.** I am in tune with my inner self. With integrity, love and self-compassion, I acknowledge my mistakes and continue to clean up the mistakes of my past and present.

**Conscious contact.** Through daily prayer and meditation, I deepen my conscious connection to the divine and experience the fullness of the universal presence as the dynamic reality of my life.

**Loving service.** Through my awakened consciousness, I am now prepared to carry the message of truth out into the world. I am now a clear channel to support the awakening of others to their true identity of wholeness.