



Becoming incarcerated with a substance abuse problem or developing one during incarceration can make an already difficult situation far worse. Entering into a program available at your institution which helps combat substance abuse is essential and should be sought immediately.

It is imperative to seek professional help in fighting addiction. Before stopping or cutting down suddenly on drinking or using drugs, seek the advice of an appropriate professional. It can be potentially dangerous, even life-threatening, to suddenly stop taking something your body is used to getting. You may need a prescription that serves as a substitute for the addictive substance or to reduce your drinking or drug use gradually rather than trying to stop "cold turkey." A professional will know the best way to help you 1) stop using; 2) stay drug-free; and 3) become and remain productive in the context of family, work, and society.

In addition to entering a program and seeking professional help, there are other steps you can take now to help regain control over your illness and life.

According to a 2012 study by the Partnership at Drugfree.org and the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, more than 23 million Americans have overcome addiction.

Source: <http://luxury.rehabs.com/drug-addiction/recovery-statistics/>

Take a True Inventory of Your Life and Addiction

STEP 1 Make a list of all the pros and cons associated with addiction. This is an important step because it will help you realize the pro list is non-existent, but the con list goes on and on. Give this the attention it deserves - the attention you deserve.

STEP 2 Discuss your addiction with someone you trust who is not an addict. Be honest, don't get mad or defensive, and listen to what they say. Whether it's a pen-pal, a counselor, or a friend on the inside, talk it out. No one who cares about you wants to see you continue on this path. Sometimes having an honest conversation with someone we trust can help both parties recognize the need for change and lead to the next step.

STEP 3 Ask yourself this question: What is stopping me from quitting?

STEP 4 Keep track of your substance abuse, including how often and how much you use. This gives you a better picture of the role addiction is playing in your life. Many people have fought addiction by maintaining an addiction diary. Be honest with yourself if you do this. An example of how to maintain an addiction diary is included on the next page.

Personal Cravings Journal

Circumstances	Intensity	Emotions & Physical Reaction	Initial Response	Better Response
<p>Who were you with? What happened? When did it happen? Where were you?</p>	<p><i>Rate the intensity of the craving 1-10.</i></p>	<p><i>What was I feeling during the craving? What did I feel physically and where in my body?</i></p>	<p><i>What thoughts went through my head just before the craving?</i></p>	<p><i>Is there another way to view the situation? What advice would I give to a friend in this situation? What would help in the future?</i></p>
<p>Example: I was with my co-worker at dinner after work on Tuesday. She asked if I'd cover her shifts the following week.</p>	<p>Example: 4</p>	<p>Example: Overwhelmed, frustrated, angry. Physically I felt it in my back and stomach.</p>	<p>Example: I can't handle the added workload. She expects too much of me. I just covered for her; she takes advantage of my kindness. I feel weak and need a drink.</p>	<p>Example: I overreacted to the situation. I meditated when I got home, and the craving went away.</p>

What's Next

STEP 1 If you are still reading at this point, you have likely answered the last question – nothing. The very first thing to do at this point is research what resources are available at your own institution. Is there a program for substance abuse? If not, is there a group formed by other inmates battling addiction? Put your feelers out and see. Having people to talk to who are also fighting addiction can be a big help. Seek out a program, but know that you can still do this if you do not have one available to you. If you are fortunate enough to have access to a program or a group, do not miss meetings. Go sick, go tired, go late - just go! Meetings must be a priority. Treat them like a job.

STEP 2 Consider problem associations and distance yourself from those groups. People abusing and/or selling need to fall from your friend list immediately. If you have a friend fighting addiction, battling the problem together can certainly be a help. However, if the friend is using and not fighting, you should sever your ties with the person. Surrounding yourself with people interested in improving their lives is the best approach. Build a sober network you can look up to and grow with. Avoid problem areas in your institution as best you can.

STEP 3 Consider asking for a transfer if you are currently incarcerated in a cell or pod with abusers or sellers. Prison politics can be a difficult issue to navigate; however, you must do your best to get away from problem people. If you are housed with them, finding alternative cellmates is the only realistic option.

STEP 4 Addiction often stems from a way of dealing with stress. Understand that stress does not go away. You must come up with new methods to manage your stress. Exercise is a fantastic way to combat stress. Exercise helps us release endorphins, lower blood pressure, and sleep better. It is a no-brainer that exercise is right for all of us.

Additional Resource! You might find our [Maintaining Your Health Self-help guide](#) helpful in getting your body in motion. It has some great workouts that can be done in your cell or on the yard, as well as general health tips to help take steps toward improving your overall health.

Get your
FREE COPY

SEND A SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE TO*:

WriteAPrisoner.com
Maintaining Your Health Self-help
P.O. Box 10
Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

* Prison staff or pen-pals can also print this guide at
<http://www.writeaprisoner.com/self-help>

STEP 5 Be honest with prison staff! Being incarcerated does not make us exempt from dental or medical problems. If you are having a dental or medical procedure done, let your dentist or doctor know about your previous substance abuse. While it is possible they will already have this information about you, they may prescribe less addictive medications if they know. Make sure they know. Being open and honest with medical professionals both in and, hopefully, out of prison one day is important.

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All the suffering, stress, and addiction comes from not realizing you already are what you are looking for.

- Jon Kabat-Zinn

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STEP 6 Set and reach goals – not just around addiction, but around your entire life. Goals should be simple and attainable, but actual goals that mean something: read a book, don't miss a meeting for a month, and reconnect with estranged family or friends (as long as they are law-abiding and addiction-free) are examples of simple, worthy goals that you can attain. Grow as a person, and your world will grow along with you.

STEP 7 Relapse can and does happen. Fight relapsing with every fiber of your being, but know that life does not (usually) end with a relapse. Learn from it. What caused it? Were you stressed? Were you feeling good and wanted to feel ever better? Were you in physical or emotional pain? Did it happen when you were hanging out with certain people? Was it a place? Learn what triggered your relapse. The next time you are experiencing the same thing, talk to someone before using. And if you do find yourself relapsing, getting clean as soon as possible is imperative to getting back on track. Do not let a single bad decision lead to an entirely ruined life. Catch yourself and start over immediately.

Tips & Points

- Make and carry a list of all the reasons you want to stay clean. Read it in difficult times before using.
- Understand and never forget that addiction is a disease. Once you have it, it is always there. Remember that many people with all sorts of diseases, even addiction, live long, productive, and happy lives. You can, too.
- Remind yourself that cravings do not last forever. Be strong and survive the craving. It will pass.
- Try hobby after hobby until you find one you like. You will! Hobbies are great ways to occupy our minds and pass time.
- Do not dwell on setbacks or situations that cause you stress. Focus on the good in you and in your life.
- Congratulate yourself each day you make it through without using. It is a huge victory!
- Help others. Prison is filled with people needing that help. Sometimes helping someone with their problem helps us keep our mind off our own problems. Some inmates chose to prey on new inmates. Try to befriend and help one. We all need someone to look out for us from time to time.

There isn't a perfect science to treating addiction. It is a trial and error situation. What works best for one person does not work the same for the next person. You must find what works best for you. Just remember, you are worthy of a life free of addiction. When you are clean, the good only gets better. We hope you rise up and take this opportunity to improve your life. When you do that, you not only improve your life, you improve the lives of the people who love you. We hope you get clean. If you already are clean, please stay that way. We wish you all the love and luck in the world!

Success story or suggestion? We want to know what worked for you so we can share it with other inmates.

If you have a suggestion to make about this resource, please do so at:

Self-help Suggestion - P.O. Box 10 - Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

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