

PAW: Symptoms and Survival

The Symptoms of Post-Acute Withdrawal

The most common post-acute withdrawal symptoms are:

- Mood swings
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Tiredness
- Variable energy
- Low enthusiasm
- Variable concentration
- Disturbed sleep

Post-acute withdrawal feels like a rollercoaster of symptoms. In the beginning, your symptoms will change minute to minute and hour to hour. Later as you recover further they will disappear for a few weeks or months only to return again. As you continue to recover the good stretches will get longer and longer. But the bad periods of post-acute withdrawal can be just as intense and last just as long.

Each post-acute withdrawal episode usually last for a few days. Once you've been in recovery for a while, you will find that each post-acute withdrawal episode usually lasts for a few days. There is no obvious trigger for most episodes. You will wake up one day feeling irritable and have low energy. If you hang on for just a few days, it will lift just as quickly as it started. After a while you'll develop confidence that you can get through post-acute withdrawal, because you'll know that each episode is time limited.

Post-acute withdrawal usually lasts for 2 years. This is one of the most important things you need to remember. If you're up for the challenge you can get through this. But if you think that post-acute withdrawal will only last for a few months, then you'll get caught off guard, and when you're disappointed you're more likely to relapse.

How to Survive Post-Acute Withdrawal

Be patient. You can't hurry recovery. But you can get through it one day at a time. If you resent post-acute withdrawal, or try to bulldoze your way through it, you will become exhausted. And when you're exhausted you will think of using to escape.

Post-acute withdrawal symptoms are a sign that your brain is recovering. Therefore don't resent them. Remember, each day ahead is a day closer to full recovery.

Go with the flow. Withdrawal symptoms are uncomfortable. But the more you resent them the worse they'll seem. You'll have lots of good days over the next two years. Enjoy them. You'll also have lots of bad days. On those days, don't try to do too much. Take care of yourself, focus on your recovery, and you'll get through this.

Practice self-care. Give yourself lots of little breaks over the next two years. Tell yourself "what I am doing is enough." Be good to yourself. That is what most addicts can't do, and that's what you must learn in recovery. Recovery is the opposite of addiction.

Sometimes you'll have little energy or enthusiasm for anything. Understand this and don't over book your life. Give yourself permission to focus on your recovery.

Post-acute withdrawal can be a trigger for relapse. You'll go for weeks without any withdrawal symptoms, and then one day you'll wake up and your withdrawal will hit you like a ton of bricks. You'll have slept badly. You'll be in a bad mood. Your energy will be low. And if you're not prepared for it, if you think that post-acute withdrawal only lasts for a few months, or if you think that you'll be different and it won't be as bad for you, then you'll get caught off guard. But if you know what to expect you can do this.

Being able to relax will help you through post-acute withdrawal. When you're tense you tend to dwell on your symptoms and make them worse. When you're relaxed it's easier to not get caught up in them. You aren't as triggered by your symptoms which means you're less likely to relapse.

Balance in Recovery

Recovery is not just about staying away from certain people, avoiding areas downtown and not using. It's a process – a way of life. Self-care is essential to reach your vision of success but to do this you will need to consider taking care of you physical self, your mental and emotional well-being, having a healthy social life and acknowledging your spiritual self (whatever this means for you). Using often becomes a daily routine for so long that it becomes second nature for a lot of people. Having a healthier lifestyle can also become second nature over time with some practice and focus.

Please fill out the chart below and include activities that will help you in your process of recovery.

<u>Physical Body</u>	<u>Mental / Emotional</u>
Today –	Today –
Tomorrow –	Tomorrow –
Rest of the week –	Rest of the week –
<u>Social Life</u>	<u>Spiritual Self</u>
Today –	Today –
Tomorrow –	Tomorrow –
Rest of the week –	Rest of the week –

Post-Acute Withdrawal (PAW)

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(the language in the following article has been updated to reflect Best Practices in Ontario)

When most people think about substance abuse / dependency, they think only of the alcohol/drug-based symptoms and forget about the sobriety-based symptoms. Yet it is the sobriety-based symptoms, especially post-acute withdrawal, that make sobriety so difficult. The presence of brain dysfunction has been documented in 75-95% of tested recovery individuals. Recent research indicates that the symptoms of post-acute withdrawal associated with alcohol/drug-related damage to the brain may contribute to many cases of relapse.

Post-acute withdrawal means symptoms that occur after acute withdrawal. **Post** means **after**. And **syndrome** means **a group of symptoms**.

Syndrome: A group of symptoms

Post: After

Post-acute Withdrawal: Symptoms that occur after acute withdrawal.

Post-acute withdrawal is a group of symptoms that occurs as a result of abstinence from addictive chemicals. These symptoms appear seven to fourteen days into abstinence, after stabilization from the acute withdrawal.

Post-acute withdrawal is a bio-psycho-social syndrome. It results from the combination of damage to the nervous system caused by alcohol or drugs and the psychosocial stress of coping with life without drugs or alcohol.

Recovery causes a great deal of stress. Many chemically dependent people never learn to manage stress without alcohol and drug use. The stress aggravates the brain dysfunction and makes the symptoms worse. The severity of PAW depends upon two things: the severity of the brain dysfunction caused by the addiction and the amount of psychosocial stress experienced in recovery.

The symptoms of PAW typically grow to peak intensity over three to six months after abstinence begins. The damage is usually reversible, meaning the major symptoms go away in time if proper treatment is received. So there is no need to fear. With proper treatment and effective sober living, it is possible to learn to live normally in spite of the impairments. But the adjustment does not occur rapidly. Recovery from the nervous system damage usually required from six to 24 months with the assistance of a healthy recovery program. Recent research is showing that for some recovering people the symptoms of PAW often occur at regular "moon cycle" intervals and without apparent

outside stressors. Often those 30, 60, 90, 120, 180, and 1 & 2-year sobriety dates seem to be "triggering" times for PAW symptoms to increase. People recovering from long term opiate and stimulant use often have PAW symptoms for no apparent reason for up to 10 years after they have stopped using their drug of choice. Often PAW symptoms appear to come and go without apparent reason and without any specific pattern. Individuals who intend to have consistent long-term recovery must learn to recognize these symptoms and learn how to manage them.

Symptoms of Post-Acute Withdrawal

How do you know if you have PAW? The most identifiable characteristic is the inability to solve usually simple problems. There are six major types of PAW symptoms that contribute to this. They are the inability to think clearly, memory problems, emotional overreactions and numbness, sleep disturbances, physical coordination problems and general problems in managing stress. The inability to solve usually simple problems because of any or all of these symptoms leads to diminished self-esteem. A person often feels incompetent, embarrassed, and

“not okay” about themselves. Diminished self-esteem and the fear of failure interfere with productive and challenging living. Let’s take a look at some of the PAW symptoms that contribute to the inability to solve usually simple problems.

Common Types of PAW Symptoms

1. Inability to think clearly
2. Memory problems
3. Emotional overreactions or numbness
4. Sleep disturbances
5. Physical coordination problems
6. Stress sensitivity

Inability to Think Clearly

There are several thought disorders experienced by a recovering person when PAW is activated. Intelligence is not affected. It is as if the brain is malfunctioning **sometimes**. Sometimes it works all right. Sometimes it does not.

One of the most common symptoms is **the inability to concentrate** for more than a few minutes. **Impairment of abstract reasoning** is another common symptom of post-acute withdrawal. An abstraction is a nonconcrete idea or concept, something that you cannot hold in your hand, take a picture of, or put in a box. Concentration is more of a problem when abstract concepts are involved.

Another common symptom is **rigid and repetitive thinking**. The same thoughts may go around and around in your head and you are unable to break through this circular thinking in order to put thoughts together in an orderly way.

Memory Problems

Short-term memory problems are very common in the recovering person. You may hear something and understand it, but within 20 minutes you forget it. Someone will give an instruction and you know exactly what to do. But you may walk away, and that memory becomes clouded or may disappear completely.

Sometimes during stressful periods it may also be difficult to remember significant events from the past. These memories are not gone; the person may be able to remember them easily at other times. The person realizes that he or she knows but just cannot recall it while experiencing the stress.

Because of memory problems in recovery, it may be difficult to learn new skills and information. You learn skills by acquiring knowledge and building upon what you have already learned. Memory problems make it difficult to build upon what you have already learned.

Emotional Overreaction or Numbness

Persons with emotional problems in sobriety tend to overreact. When things happen that require two units of emotional reaction, they react with ten. It is like holding the “times” key down on a calculator. You may find yourself becoming angry over what may later seem a trivial matter. You may feel more anxious or excited than you have reason to be. When this overreaction puts more stress on the nervous systems than it can handle, there is an emotional shutdown. If this happens to you, you become emotionally numb, unable to feel anything. And even when you know you should feel something, you do not. You may swing from one mood to another without knowing why.

Sleep Problems

Most recovering people experience sleep problems. Some of them are temporary; some are lifelong. The most common in early recovery is unusual or disturbing dreams. These dreams may interfere with your ability to get the sleep you need. But they become less frequent and less severe as the length of abstinence increases.

Mike was a periodic drinker. Periods of sobriety usually lasted for several months. During the time he was not drinking, he had dreams that severely disrupted his sleep. His wife said, “I never realized the nightmares Mike was having had anything to do with drinking or not drinking. He would frequently jump out of bed, screaming in terror. When I was able to awaken him and calm him, he couldn’t remember what he had dreamt, but he remembered being afraid. After a year of sobriety, he seldom had the dreams. Only then did I realize that they were related to his drinking.

Even if you do not experience unusual dreams, you may have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. You may experience changes in your sleep patterns; sleeping for long periods at a time or sleeping at different times of the day. Some of these patterns may never return to “normal,” but most people are able to adjust to them without severe difficulty.

Physical Coordination Problems

A very serious PAW problem – though perhaps not as common as the others – is difficulty with physical coordination. Common symptoms are dizziness, trouble with balance, problems with coordination between hand and eye, and slow reflexes. These result in clumsiness and accident proneness. This is how the term “dry drunk” came into being. When alcoholics appeared drunk because of stumbling and clumsiness, but had not been drinking, they were said to be “dry drunk.” They had the appearance of being intoxicated without drinking.

Stress Sensitivity

Difficulty in managing stress is the most confusing and aggravating part of post-acute withdrawal. Recovering people are often unable to distinguish between low-stress situations and high-stress situations. They may not recognize low levels of stress, and then overreact when they become aware of the stress they are experiencing. They may feel stressful in situations that ordinarily would not bother them, and in addition, when they react they overreact. They may do things that are completely inappropriate for the situation. So much so that later on they may wonder why they reacted so strongly.

To complicate things further, all of the other symptoms of post-acute withdrawal become worse during times of high stress. There is a direct relationship between elevated stress and the severity of PAW. Each intensifies the other. The intensity of PAW creates stress, and stress aggravates PAW and makes it more severe. At times of low stress, the symptoms get better and **may even go away**. When you are well rested and relaxed, eating properly, and getting along well with people, you will probably appear to be fine. Your thoughts will be clear, your emotions appropriate, and your memory all right. At times of high stress, however, your brain may suddenly shut down. You may begin experiencing thinking problems, inappropriate emotions, and memory problems.

If your thoughts become confused and chaotic or you are unable to concentrate, if you have trouble remembering or solving problems, you may feel you are going crazy. You are not. These symptoms are a normal part of your recovery and are reversible with abstinence and a recovery program. If you do not understand this you may develop shame and guilt, which leads to diminished self-esteem and isolation, which creates stress and increased PAW. It is a painful cycle that is unnecessary if you understand what is happening. As your body and your mind begin to heal and as you learn ways to reduce the risk of post-acute withdrawal symptoms, productive and meaningful living is possible in spite of the very real possibility of recurring symptoms.

Recovery from the damage caused by the addiction requires abstinence. The damage itself interferes with the ability to abstain. This is the paradox of recovery. Use of alcohol or other drugs can temporarily reverse the symptoms of the damage. If individuals in recovery use alcohol or drugs, they will think clearly for a little while, be able to have normal feelings and emotions for a little while, feel healthy for a little while.

Unfortunately, the process of addiction will eventually trigger a loss of control that will again destroy these functions.

For this reason it is necessary to do everything possible to reduce the symptoms of PAW. It is necessary to understand PAW and to recognize that you are not incompetent and you are not going crazy. Because post-acute withdrawal symptoms are stress sensitive, you need to learn about PAW and methods of control when stress levels are low in order to be able to prevent the symptoms or to manage them when they occur. Here are some stories about some people who experienced post-acute withdrawal and how it affected their lives without their being aware of what was happening to them.

Ray is a young, single male recovering from alcohol abuse. He stopped drinking when he was 22 and was very excited about the possibilities that lay ahead of him in his sobriety. After his initial treatment he began restructuring his life around recovery. He was eager to make up for the time he had wasted during his years of drinking. He got a full-time job, enrolled in college and committed himself to doing some volunteer work. After a while he began to notice that he was having trouble with his schoolwork. He found himself confused about things that had at one time been easy for him to follow and figure out. He was having trouble taking care of his financial responsibilities, and when people that cared about him tried to help him figure things out, he felt panicky and overwhelmed. Thoughts rushed through his head and he was unable to put them in order. He says, "When someone in the financial aid office at the college started talking to me about grant money, loan money, interest, and forms that needed to be filled out, I was so confused and overwhelmed that I couldn't hear what she was saying. Everything was going around in my head at once and I had to get away. I got up and left without filling out the financial aid form."

In desperation, and out of fear that he would drink, Ray "ran." Instead of evaluating what things in his life he needed to change and what he needed to hold onto, he gave up everything. He quit his job, dropped out of school, and stopped doing volunteer work. He gave up his apartment and moved in with a relative until he could "get himself together." These actions created additional problems with which he found it increasingly difficult to cope. Until he went to a counselor and learned some ways to manage his symptoms, Ray thought he was having a nervous breakdown, when in fact what he was experiencing was PAW.

Patterns of PAW

Post-acute withdrawal symptoms are not the same in everyone. They vary in how severe they are, how often they occur, and how long they last. Some people experience certain symptoms; some people have other symptoms; some people have none at all. Over a period of time PAW may get better, it may get worse, it may stay the same, or it may come and go. If it gets better with time we call it **regenerative**. If it gets worse we call it **degenerative**. If it stays the same we call it **stable**. And if it comes and goes we call it **intermittent**.

Regenerative PAW gradually improves over time. The longer a person is sober the less severe the symptoms become. It is easier for people with regenerative PAW to recover because the brain rapidly returns to normal.

Degenerative PAW is the opposite. The symptoms get worse the longer a person is sober. This may happen even when a person is following some type of recovery program. People with degenerative PAW tend to become relapse prone. Sobriety becomes so painful that they feel they must self-medicate the pain with alcohol or drugs, collapse physically or emotionally, or commit suicide to end the pain.

A person with stable PAW experiences the same level of symptoms for a long period of time into recovery. There may be days when the symptoms are a little better or a little worse, but essentially the symptoms remain unchanged. Most recovering people find this very frustrating because they believe that they should be feeling better the longer they are sober. With sufficient sober time many people learn to manage these symptoms.

With intermittent PAW the symptoms come and go. Initially people with intermittent symptoms will appear to experience a regenerative pattern. In other words, their symptoms rapidly get better. But then they begin to experience periodic PAW episodes that can be quite severe. For some people the episodes get shorter, less severe, and farther apart until they stop altogether. In others they occur periodically throughout life. These patterns describe people who have not had treatment for PAW and who do not know how to manage or prevent the symptoms. Traditional treatment does not address these symptoms because until recently they were unrecognized. If you know what to do and you are willing to do it, degenerative PAW can be changed into stable, stable into regenerative, and regenerative into intermittent PAW.

The most common pattern of PAW is regenerative and over time it becomes intermittent. It gradually gets better until the symptoms disappear and then it comes and goes. The first step is to bring PAW symptoms into remission. This means bringing them under control so that you are not experiencing them at the present time. Then the goal is to reduce how often they occur, how long the episode lasts, and how bad the symptoms are. You must remember that even when you are not experiencing them there is always the tendency for them to recur. It is necessary to build a resistance against them – an insurance policy that lowers your risk.

Managing PAW Symptoms

The less you do to strengthen yourself against an episode of post-acute withdrawal, the weaker your resistance becomes. It is like a tetanus shot. The longer it has been since you have had one, the more risk there is that you will become seriously ill if you cut yourself on a piece of rusty metal. Conditions that put you in high risk of experiencing

post-acute withdrawal symptoms are usually lack of care of yourself and lack of attention to your recovery program. If you are going to recover without relapse you need to be aware of stressful situations in your life that can increase your risk of experiencing PAW.

Since you cannot remove yourself from all stressful situations you need to prepare yourself to handle them when they occur. It is not the situation that makes you go to pieces; it is your reaction to the situation.

Because stress triggers and intensifies the symptoms of post-acute withdrawal, learning to manage stress can control PAW. You can learn to identify sources of stress and develop skills in decision-making and problem solving to help reduce stress. Proper diet, exercise, regular habits and positive attitudes all play important parts in controlling PAW. Relaxation can be used as a tool to retrain the brain to function properly and to reduce stress.

Stabilization

If you are experiencing post-acute withdrawal symptoms, it is important to bring them under control as soon as possible. Here are some suggestions that may help you be aware of what is going on and help you to interrupt the symptoms before they get out of control.

Verbalization: Start talking to people who are not going to accuse, criticize, or minimize. You need to talk about what you are experiencing. It will help you look at your situation more realistically. It will help you bring internal symptoms to your conscious awareness. And it will give you support when you need others to rely upon.

Ventilation: Express as much as you can about what you are thinking and feeling even if it seems irrational and unfounded.

Reality Testing: Ask someone if you are making sense. Not just what you are saying but your behaviour. Your perception of what is going on may be very different from reality.

Problem Solving and Goal Setting: What are you going to do right now about what is going on? You can choose to take action that can change things.

Backtracking: Think back over what has been happening. Can you identify how the episode started? What could have turned it off sooner? Think of other times that you were experiencing symptoms of PAW. What turned it on? What turned it off? Were there other options that might have worked better or sooner?

Education and Retraining

Learning about addiction, recovery and post-acute withdrawal symptoms helps to relieve the anxiety, guilt and confusion that tend to create the stress that intensify PAW symptoms. As a recovering person, you need information in order to realize what symptoms are normal during recovery.

You also need to learn management skills so that you will know what to do to interrupt and control the stress and the symptoms when they occur. Through retraining you can improve your ability to remember, to concentrate and to think clearly. Retraining

involves practicing certain skills in a safe environment as you build confidence. It includes learning to take things step by step and to handle one thing at a time so you do not feel overwhelmed. It includes writing down what you want to remember and asking questions when you think that need to have something clarified.

Learning about the symptoms of post-acute withdrawal, knowing what to expect and not overreacting to the symptoms increases the ability to function appropriately and effectively.

Self-Protective Behaviour

When all is said and done, you are responsible for protecting yourself from anything that threatens your sobriety or anything that triggers post-acute withdrawal symptoms. Reducing the stress resulting from and contributing to the symptoms of post-acute withdrawal must be of prime consideration for you. You must learn behaviour that will protect you from the stress that might put your sobriety in jeopardy. This **self-protective behaviour** is behaviour that will enable you to be firm in accepting your own needs and not allowing other people or situations to push you into reactions that are not in the best interest of your sobriety.

In order to protect yourself from unnecessary stress, you must first identify your own stress triggers, those situations that might bring about an overreaction from you. Then learn to change those situations, avoid them, change your reactions, or learn to interrupt them before they get out of control.

Nutrition

The way you eat has a lot to do with the level of stress you experience and your ability to manage the symptoms of post-acute withdrawal. Poor health itself contributes to stress and malnutrition contributes to poor health. You may be malnourished because of poor eating habits or because your body damaged by alcohol or drugs, was unable to use the nutrients that you consumed.

Abstinence from alcohol and drugs will bring about some improvement but abstinence alone is not sufficient to rebuild damaged body tissue and maintain good health. New eating habits must be established and practiced regularly and permanently. Your daily diet should contain a balance of vegetables, fruit, carbohydrates, proteins, fats and dairy products. Ask a nutritionist to help you figure out how many calories you need each day and what quantities of each type of food.

DIET FOR A RECOVERING PERSON

- Three Well-Balanced Meals Daily –
- Three Nutritious Snacks Daily –
- No Sugar or Caffeine –

Hunger produces stress. Try to plan your eating schedule so that you do not skip meals and so that you can have periodic nutritious snacks. Do not eat candy, donuts, soft drinks, potato chips, or other high calorie, low nutrient foods. You should specifically

avoid foods that produce stress such as concentrated sweets and caffeine. Both of these produce the same kind of chemical reaction in your body as being frightened or overly excited. Concentrated sweets such as candy, jelly, syrup and sugar-sweetened soft drinks will give you a quick “pick-up,” but you will experience a letdown about an hour later accompanied by nervousness and irritability. Remember that your reason for eating a snack is to combat fatigue and nervousness. Have a nutritious snack before you feel hungry to prevent a craving for sweets.

Jayne was in the habit of eating a large quantity of ice cream every night. She often talked about the craving for it she felt and believed that by eating it she was reducing a craving for alcohol. The next morning she always felt sluggish and irritable. Throughout the day her stress increased until it was relieved by the ice cream. When her counselor suggested that she remove the ice cream from her diet she felt she could not get along without it. When she and her counselor examined her diet they found that she ate no breakfast and was not getting adequate nutrition throughout the day. She agreed to try eating a balanced diet and to eliminate the ice cream on a trial basis. She discovered that when she ate a balanced diet and ate regular meals and several nutritious snacks throughout the day her craving for ice cream disappeared and she could easily eliminate it from her life.

Caffeine also causes nervousness and restlessness. It may also interfere with concentration and your ability to sleep. Loss of sleep or irregular sleep causes irritability, depression, and anxiety.

Exercise

Exercise helps rebuild the body and keeps it functioning properly while also reducing stress. Exercise produces chemicals in your brain that make you feel good. These chemicals are nature’s own tranquilizers to relieve pain, anxiety and tension.

Different types of exercise are helpful for different reasons. Stretching and aerobic exercise will probably be most helpful for your recovery. Stretching exercises help to keep your body limber and to relieve muscle tension. Aerobics are rhythmical and vigorous exercises for the large muscles. Aerobics are intended to raise your heart rate to 75% of its maximum rate and maintain that rate for at least 20-30 minutes.

We recommend regular use of aerobic exercise. Jogging, swimming, jumping rope and bicycling are common aerobic exercises, or you might want to join an aerobics class. Dancing can also be aerobic, but remember that it must be done vigorously.

Many recovering people will testify to the value of exercise in reducing the intensity of PAW symptoms. After they exercise they feel much better, find it easier to concentrate and remember, and are able to be more productive.

Choose a form of exercise that is fun for you so that you will stick with it. Most doctors and health books will tell you to exercise three or four times a week, but we recommend that recovering people make time for it every day because of its value in reducing stress. Any day that you do not exercise is a day that you are cheating yourself of a way to feel more relaxed, be more productive, and have more energy. Whatever exercise you choose, remember, do not over-do it! If it hurts don't do it. The old adage "no pain, no gain" is not true for recovering people. Consistency and regularity are the key words for the recovering person.

Relaxation

There are things you can do to readily reduce or escape the stress you feel when you are unable to change a situation or to better cope with the stress of everyday living. Laughing, playing, listening to music, story telling, fantasizing, reading, and massage are some methods of natural stress reduction.

Playing is a necessary form of relaxation that is often neglected. It is difficult to define play because it is not so much what you do as how you do it. We all need time for having fun, laughing, being childlike and free. There are other "diversions" you can use as natural stress reducers. Try a body massage, a bubble bath, or a walk by yourself or with a friend.

Deep relaxation is a way of relaxing the body and mind to reduce stress and produce a sense of well-being. Deep relaxation rebalances the body and reduces the production of stress hormones. What happens when you relax is the opposite of the "fight or flight" reaction. When you relax, your muscles become heavy, your body temperature rises, and your breathing and heart rate slow down. A muscle cannot relax and tense at the same time. It is impossible to maintain tension while physically relaxing. You can learn techniques to allow your body to relax. The distress resulting from thought process impairments, emotional process impairments, memory impairments, and stress sensitivity can be reduced or relieved through proper use of relaxation.

There are a variety of relaxation exercises that you can use. You can get a book that will offer you a selection of exercises or you can purchase tape-recorded exercises. You can close your eyes in a comfortable position and repeat a pleasant word over and over to yourself. Or you can imagine yourself in a soothing environment such as by a quiet lake or in a green meadow. Pick a method that is relaxing to you and use it often. You will find it a helpful aid for reducing stress and creating peace of mind and serenity.

Spirituality

Spirituality can be defined as "an active relationship with a power greater than yourself that gives your life meaning and purpose."

It is important to examine your values and look within yourself to determine whether your life is in harmony with those values.

Spiritual discipline is a consciously chosen course of action. Discipline is uncomfortable for many in recovery. They have lived lives of immediate gratification and discipline is the reverse of that. The purpose of spiritual discipline is freedom from the slavery of self-indulgence. Spiritual discipline can include prayer and meditation, spiritual fellowship, and regular inventory of your spiritual growth.

Balanced Living

Balanced living means that there is bio-psycho-social-spiritual harmony in your life. It means that you are healthy physically and psychologically and that you have healthy relationships. It means that you are spiritually whole. It means that you are no longer focused on one aspect of your life. It means you are living responsibly, giving yourself time for your job, your family, your friends as well as time for your own growth and recovery.

It means having a balance between work and play, between fulfilling your responsibilities to other people and your need for self-fulfillment. It means functioning as nearly as possible at your optimum stress level, maintaining enough stress to keep you functioning in a healthy way and not overloading yourself with stress so that it becomes counterproductive. With balanced living, immediate gratification as a lifestyle is given up in order to attain fulfilling and meaningful living.

Balanced living requires proper health care so that the body is functioning well. Nutrition, rest, and exercise all receive the proper focus in your life to provide energy, manage stress, allow freedom from illness and pain, combat fatigue and rebuild a damaged body.

Freedom from physical distress allows psychological growth. When you feel good it is easier to think about your attitudes and values and to work on eliminating guilt and anger. Balanced living requires doing things to develop self-confidence and self-esteem and learning to feel good about yourself.

Balanced living needs a strong social network that nurtures you and encourages a healthy, recovery-oriented lifestyle. A healthy network provides a sense of belonging. It includes relationships in which you feel you are a valuable part. It can include immediate family members, friends, relatives, co-workers, counselors, employers, self-help group members and sponsors.

Even after a couple of years of sobriety Walter had times when he found it more difficult than usual to remember things: when he was more irritable and anxious, when he overreacted around his family and friends, when he felt confused and overwhelmed. His wife began to notice that he experienced these symptoms more on Saturdays. What was different about Saturday? He usually slept later and had a couple of cups of coffee as soon as he got up, he began going over to visit his AA sponsor as early as possible. Together they drank coffee, ate donuts, smoked their pipes, and talked. Walter stayed until early afternoon, and by the time he got home and had lunch it was usually 1:30 or 2:00 in the afternoon. If one of his kids left a bike in the driveway or his wife was on the phone too long, he found himself overreacting and leaving the house. The rest of the day was totally unproductive because of what became know in his family as his "Saturday Syndrome."

Walter decided to try some alternate activities to see if there was a change in his reactions. He started drinking orange juice as soon as he woke up instead of coffee. That helped, so he decided to try eating breakfast. That helped even more. He and his sponsor started drinking decaffeinated coffee and he skipped the donuts. He came home early enough to have lunch and to exercise for a while. He then felt like doing something with his family in the afternoon. They were all amazed at the disappearance of the "Saturday Syndrome."

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