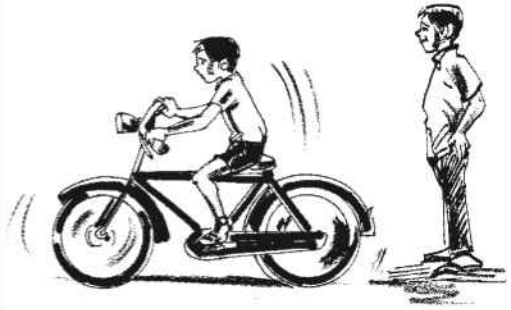


## MAINTAINING SOBRIETY

Recovery starts with staying away from all mood altering drugs. It is the fundamental requirement and it should be given the top priority. Giving up drugs and starting a new drug free life is like laying the foundation for a new house. While building a house, we need to give attention at each stage to every part of the structure. Similarly, each and every component of our lives must be improved – only then a new and meaningful life can be enjoyed.

*Learning to stay sober is like learning to ride a bicycle. We necessarily need to learn cycling from someone who knows cycling. However good the person is in teaching us, we too have to put in our efforts to learn the skill. For the first few days, we may falter, lose balance and fall down a couple of times.*



*Once we have learnt the skill well enough, it becomes our second nature. It becomes automatic. Finally, however good a cyclist we are, we have to be careful each time we are on a bicycle.*

Recovery is similar to this. We need others' help to learn to stay sober. But, however much others are willing to help us, we need to put in our own efforts to stay sober. Even with all the improvements, we have made in our lives, we need to be careful each and every day, in the path to sobriety.



The story of five fingers will make us understand the importance of improving the quality in every aspect of our life.

*The five fingers kept arguing as to who was the greatest and most important amongst them.*

*The little finger said "I am the greatest of all, because while worshipping God or wishing an elderly person, I stand out first".*

*The ring finger said, "I am the most important as people wear their ring - whether it is silver, gold or diamond*

*only on me and no marriage can be solemnised without me.”*

*The middle finger said, “No! I am the greatest as I am the tallest of all fingers and I have bodyguards on both sides of mine”.*

*The index finger or the pointer proudly said, “I can point out who is good and who is bad. I maintain discipline in the world. Therefore I am the greatest”.*

*Finally the thumb stood up and said, “Nothing doing. I am the most important and the greatest, for, with just one impression of mine, the whole world can be bought. I’m the legal entity.*

*So all the fingers asked God to judge which was the most important. God asked each finger to execute a task all alone without help from any other finger. They tried and failed. They went back to God and accepted defeat. Then God made them understand that all of them were equally important and would be useful only when working with the others and not just alone.*

In our lives too, merely giving up drugs is not recovery. We need to give up drugs, improve relationship with family members, get involved in work, pursue healthy recreational activities and develop trust in a Higher Power. Recovery means learning to manage life better; it means learning to lead a qualitative life.

### **Physical recovery**

- Taking care of health
- Good eating habits with a high protein diet
- Exercise
- Regular sleep

### **Psychological and behavioural recovery**

- Getting into a structured life style
- Going to work on time
- Taking up responsibilities and managing them
- Building self-esteem



- Cultivating values like honesty
- Involving in healthy recreational activities

### **Social recovery**

- Strengthening relationship with family and spending time with them
- Getting back to the social network

### **Spiritual recovery**

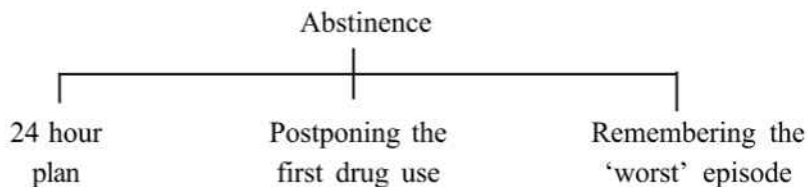
- Belief in a Higher Power
- Realising the power of prayer

Let us understand that staying away from chemicals will not turn out to be uncomfortable, frightening or impossible. The following are a few things we need to practise towards leading a sober life.

### **Staying away from the first drink / drug use**

It is the first drug use that does the damage. We cannot stop with a small quantity. It will definitely lead to many more. We will find ourselves abusing without any control with absolutely no intention of doing so. We will find ourselves right back to where we left. Therefore, the most important step in staying sober is to avoid the first use.

How are we going to manage this?



#### ***(a) Twenty Four hour plan***

All along we had sworn in the name of our parents / God that we would never ‘use’ again. In spite of our best intentions, we were never able to keep our promise. We promised but always

broke it and went back to obsessive drug use. This experience has by now taught us that long term promises do not work.

However, we feel extremely anxious and afraid at the thought that we have to stay away from drugs for the rest of our lives. So, when we decide not to use drugs 'just for today', it helps. No matter what the temptation is, we can still be determined not to use only for that day. If the desire to use is strong, the 24 hours can further be broken down to smaller durations. For instance, we can decide not to use drugs for one hour... one more hour ..... and so on. Sobriety always starts with just one sober hour.



*There were two clocks in a watch shop with a two year guarantee period. The first clock sighed and said, " My God! I have to strike 6,30,72,000 times in the next two years". The very thought of striking so many times made it absolutely tired and so it stopped. Another clock noticed this and pointed out that it was happy it had to tick only once every second.*

'One day at a time' or 'Just for today' helps us to take one small step at a time and helps to break the huge seemingly unmanageable future into small workable chunks and helps us to prioritise the day's goals - the top priority being to stay sober.

*A young boy wanted to cross a stream. He looked at the water and wondered how he was going to do it. His stress and tension made him sweat. An old man came and asked him why he was standing there. The boy replied, " I want to cross the stream, but am anxious and scared."*

*The old man said, "Come on! I will tell you how to cross the stream. First keep one foot in the water, assess the depth and place your foot firmly. Then take the next step. If you keep doing it, you will reach the shore. Follow the people who are crossing in front of you. Focus your thoughts only on the step that you are taking. Do not think about what you will do later on".*

Looking at the future with all the issues may seem overwhelming. As each new day comes, we need to tell ourselves that we will do what is possible and handle it just for that day alone. During difficult times, we have to remind ourselves that there are several people who have successfully managed their problems and are walking ahead of us in self-help group meetings.

### ***(b) Postponing use of drugs***

All of a sudden, an uncontrollable craving may occur. At that time, we should take a decision to postpone taking drugs for a few more hours. Once this idea becomes a part of our thinking, we will find it an effective method to abstain. When a big wave comes, it comes like a big force but subsides within a few minutes. Similarly, craving also disappears after a few minutes. Hence, postponing use of drugs is the best method to deal with the overwhelming urge.

After postponing, we should immediately go to a place where drug use is not allowed. It can be a temple, or the house of a close friend with whom we can share. We can also take the help of the wife, friends or counsellor either in person or over the telephone. We can eat something immediately because food in the stomach helps in handling craving. Instead of standing desperately, we need to act. This really helps.

### ***(c) Remembering the worst episode***

When we feel like taking drugs, or if somebody offers us drugs, we should think about the series of events that happened in our life because of drug use. Miseries associated with our drug use – losing the job, fights at home, accidents, financial problems - each damage should be recollected in detail. We need to remind ourselves of the last unpleasant condition and not the first pleasurable experience.

*I have written about every one of these on detail on a piece of paper which even today I carry with me wherever I go. When I feel like taking drugs, I look at this paper and it helps me to visualise the last bitter experience. With this realisation, the thought of using automatically disappears.*

### **Avoiding all mood changing drugs including alcohol**

Sleep problems are common during recovery. During the early stages, we may suffer from sleeplessness. Even when we sleep, we may get frightening dreams. Gradually, our body will get readjusted, and all these problems will disappear in the course of time.

Self-prescribed sleeping pills are no solution to this problem. On the other hand, they are a threat to sobriety. Now we should accept that our body is prone to addiction - whether it is alcohol or any other mood-changing drug. If we use any mood-changing drugs, we will definitely get hooked on to that also. A glass of hot milk, a warm shower, and deep breathing exercises are some of the methods that we can try to get over our sleeplessness.

## Getting into a disciplined way of living

Getting into a disciplined way of living includes getting up on time, eating and sleeping on time, spending time productively in the workplace and involvement in recreational activities.



*“I believe”, said a visitor to Samuel Coleridge, the poet, “that human beings should be given a free rein to think, act and make their own decisions. They need no external force or guide to advise or discipline them.”*

*Coleridge interrupted the man at this point. “I would like you to see my flower garden”, and led the man outside. The visitor took one look and exclaimed loudly, “Why, this is nothing but a yard full of weeds!”*

*“It used to be filled with roses”, said Coleridge, “but this year I let the garden grow as it willed without tending it. And this is the result.”*

If we let our wishful thinking replace realistic planning, our lives will also be filled with unwanted problematic weeds. Therefore it is important to plan and develop a structured life style.

## Getting active

During recovery, we will have a great deal of leisure time. It appears as if there is a vacuum in our life. As we all know, nature does not allow any vacuum even in our minds. It fills the mind up, possibly, with old thoughts, behaviour and activities. So we should make definite plans for activities to fill these gaps and use our energy, which had all along been spent in preoccupation or obsession with drugs. It is very hard just to sit trying not to do a certain thing, i.e. to stay away from drugs, but it is much easier to get active and engage ourselves in healthy activities. Our plan should be practical, so that in the end we do not feel tired or exhausted.

Following are a few things we can do:

- Taking a leisurely walk or going out with children
- Doing relaxation exercises
- Doing physical exercises / going to gym
- Going to movies, museums, parks



- Reviving old hobbies like reading, listening to music or gardening
- Helping other recovering addicts by sharing personal experiences as to how to stay sober

This will be a new discovery for us which really makes us feel good. This is referred to as “re-joyment “ involving in activities that bring us real pleasure and joy.

### Avoiding old routines

We need to

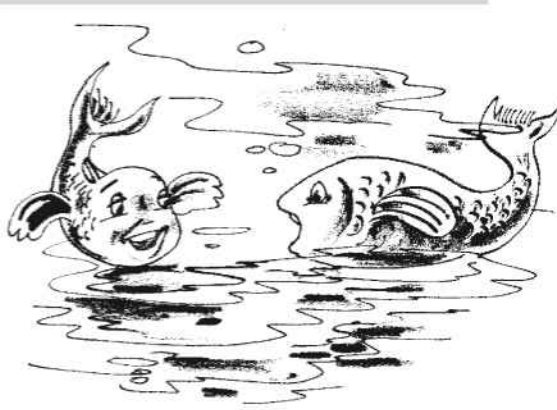
- consciously avoid any thoughts about the pleasurable effects associated with drug use
- take a different route while going home from the office / school, if a drug den is on the way
- avoid parties / rock shows, where alcohol / drugs are likely to be available.
- refrain from meeting old drug using “friends”.

*Two fish were living in a pond. One was called 'Proact' and the other, 'React'.*

*One day, they heard two fishermen talking to each other- “Plenty of fish available in this river ! Let us come tomorrow and catch a few”.*

*When Proact heard this, he told his friend, “Let us protect ourselves! We will move from this area”. React laughed and said, “You are a coward ! I won't run away from this place like you. There are so many possibilities -*

*the net they bring, may have a hole in it or who knows, tomorrow they may not come at all. Even if they come, I know 1000 tricks to get out of their hands”. Proact said, “I believe in one thing- ‘ If there is the possibility of a danger, avoid it and safeguard yourself ‘. So I am going to the other side of the river”. Next day, the fishermen came and caught React. Proact escaped since he had already gone to the other end of the river.*



It is unwise to be like React - to be over confident and just think, “I have the will power; I can always stop taking drugs if I decide to”. Like Proact, we should be wise enough to recognize and be aware of the relapse symptoms and plan realistic methods to avoid drug use.

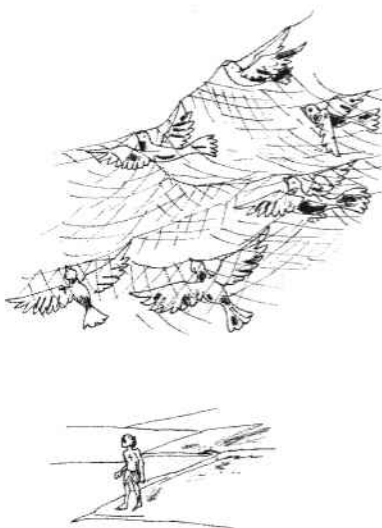
## Learning to say 'No'

Being able to say 'No' to drugs when offered requires more than a sincere decision to abstain. It requires the assertiveness to act on that decision. Sometimes, a single 'No' will be sufficient. At other times, additional strategies may be necessary. In some cases, telling the other person about your problem will be useful in eliciting helpful support. It will be unnecessary to share that information on a few other occasions also.

### Following are a few tips:

- Say 'No, Thank you'
- Speak in a clear, firm and unhesitating voice
- Make direct eye contact with the other person. This increases the effectiveness of your message
- Do not feel guilty. You won't hurt anyone by not taking drugs
- You have a right not to drink / take drugs. Stand up for your rights
- Suggest something else to drink (coffee, fruit juice)
- If the person pressurises you repeatedly, go away from that place

### Attending self-help group meetings and availing of a sponsor



*Pigeons were flying across the sky over the forest. At a particular place, they noticed that the forest floor was covered with rice. "So much rice!" one pigeon exclaimed. "Good! We do not have to worry about food for the next month!" said another pigeon.*

*But an older pigeon among the flock remained doubtful. "Wait! Rice in the middle of a forest? This must be a trap," he announced. The other pigeons did not heed his words. They dived into the forest floor to feast on the rice. Immediately, they found themselves caught in a net. It did not take them long to realise that they had been caught in a trap. They desperately pleaded to the wise pigeon that had*

*stayed behind. "Find a way to save us...", they pleaded.*

*The wise pigeon had an idea. He addressed the vain pigeons: "The strength of all of us will be required to carry out this plan", he said. "Let us all lift the net together now".*

*Meanwhile, the hunter was fast approaching the trapped pigeons. Just as he was within a few yards from them, all the pigeons flapped their wings and lifted the net along with them into the sky effortlessly. The wise pigeon said, "Now, let us go to our friend, the rat." They flew, as one, to the rat's burrow. The rat bit through the net and released the pigeons from their bondage.*

We have got caught in the net of problems created by addiction. As a single person, we find it difficult to overcome it. The fellowship of self-help groups coupled with the support from the treatment centre will help us to handle issues.

By attending self-help group meetings regularly, we will be able to 'open out' and share our feelings and thoughts with fellow members and get their reassurance and support. Moreover, the self-help group members will also be able to identify the warning signs of relapse and bring them to our notice and help us to become aware of them. Self-help group plays a key role in strengthening our sobriety.



The sponsor is a friendly guide who also happens to be a recovering individual. He can help us to solve one major problem - how to avoid drugs and stay sober. He has the tool of personal experience in recovery. He is like the man who holds the cycle and runs along, when we are learning to cycle. He will always be willing to reach out and help.

To sum up, recovery is an ongoing process which progresses through the following stages

1. Abstinence (learning how to stop)
2. Sobriety (learning to cope with life without drugs)
3. Comfortable living (learning to live comfortably while abstinent)
4. Productive living (learning to build a productive sober lifestyle.)