

# **Addiction and Recovery: The Transition in Recovery Not So Simple**

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Transitioning into recovery often proves to be an "off and on" experience for many individuals, characterized by resistance and ambivalence. This shift towards recovery frequently brings about conflicting emotions, especially about their relationship to substances. Those standing at the threshold of a new life generally do not know that they are at a crossroads between persisting in active addiction and pursuing a path to wellness.

Ambivalence emerges as a prevailing theme during this pivotal phase. Individuals with substance use disorder often wrestle with conflicting sentiments regarding quitting. Some may express a desire to quit but harbor beliefs of its impossibility. Others may recognize the destructive nature of their substance use while simultaneously wishing to continue, but without the problems it causes. Doubt about life's fulfillment without alcohol or drugs may also arise. Some embark on abstinence attempts only to abandon them when faced with the overwhelming discomfort of detox. Many acknowledge the necessity of quitting substance use but lack the consistent motivation and skills for sustained abstinence.

Understanding the perspective of the afflicted individual proves challenging for non-addicted family members. While family members may perceive the use of the substance itself as the primary issue, individuals struggling with substance use disorder may still not see it that way. Abandoning one's best friend, the substance, is challenging in many ways, and the prospect of change instills fear and resentment. At the beginning of the transition into recovery, it is common for the person to continue attributing their struggles to external factors such as family, law enforcement, or employment, viewing these elements as the real source of their woes. They blame all these elements for having to quit. In their eyes, the chemical substance remains the perceived solution.

Outside forces often compel people to quit drinking and using drugs before they develop a level of awareness that begins to penetrate denial enough to recognize the accumulating negative consequences that threaten them and their loved ones. Even as awareness of the harm caused by alcohol and other drugs grows, the desire to mitigate the harmful effects of uncontrolled substance use may persist, intertwined with a hope to discover a miraculous solution that reinstates control over their lives and allows for continuing consumption. By the time one commits to abstinence, they have likely made multiple unsuccessful attempts to regain control. Moments of crisis, marked by significant pain or fear, often catalyze cessation. Yet, it's crucial to acknowledge that while fear and pain may offer short-term motivation, they wane over time, and a return to comfort poses a risk of relapse. Without adequate support for sobriety, fear and pain alone are insufficient to break the cycle of addiction. Mere "lessons learned" do not constitute a comprehensive recovery strategy and are not ultimately effective.

The decision to quit substance use is often fraught with internal struggles. As reality becomes undeniable, defense mechanisms may crumble, prompting individuals to examine the motivating factors behind their desire to quit. This realization may occur before or during treatment. Many individuals seek help while still holding onto hopes of regaining control or selectively ceasing certain drugs. In the initial stages of recovery, the decision to quit signifies a significant sacrifice for those who still view the substance as their solution.

To family members and significant others observing the process, quitting is the only logical and sensible solution. It is difficult for family members to understand how their loved ones with substance use disorder could think otherwise. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**

People at the cross-roads try many potential solutions to reclaim control over their lives when faced with the reality of the damage created by their substance use. One of the most common "solutions" that people who have substance use problems try is switching to a different drug. Learn about cross-addiction and why this does not work for recovery. This Ebook is a digital download, immediately available.

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