



The Four Dimensions of Addiction and Recovery

Looking at the whole person, not only the substance

Alcohol and drugs are often not the whole problem. Over time, they can become a solution to problems in several areas of life. Recovery means understanding what happened physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially, then developing healthier ways to live in each area.

Recovery asks us to look at the whole person. A strong recovery in one area can support the others, and a neglected area can quietly weaken the rest.

The Four Dimensions

1. PHYSICAL

The body: intoxication, tolerance, withdrawal, craving, sleep, appetite, pain, energy, health, and regulation.

2. MENTAL

The mind: obsession, rationalization, selective memory, minimization, distorted thinking, and decision-making.

3. SPIRITUAL

Meaning and direction: values, purpose, hope, humility, integrity, connection, and something larger than immediate relief.

4. SOCIAL

Life with other people: trust, belonging, communication, roles, boundaries, support, isolation, work, family, and community.

A First Look at Where I Am Today

Physical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Mental	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Spiritual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Social	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Which dimension feels strongest today, and which feels thinnest?

The goal is not balance every day. The goal is awareness, honesty, and the next healthy action.



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Physical recovery: what happens in the body before, during, and after use

The physical dimension includes more than medical consequences. Addiction can change tolerance, withdrawal, sleep, appetite, stress response, energy, pain, and the body's expectation of relief. For many people, once alcohol or another drug is introduced into the body, a powerful drive for more can become much harder to control.

Once I Start, Something Changes



A classic 12-step formulation describes this as a physical craving or compulsion for more after the first drink or drug. Not every person or substance follows the same biological pattern, but the practical question is personal: what does my own history show happens after I start?

What Does My Body Tell Me?

What usually happens after I take the first drink or drug?

How often has "just one" stayed at one?

What happens to my ability to follow the plan I made before using?

What physical states make me more vulnerable: exhaustion, pain, hunger, withdrawal, stress, poor sleep, illness, or something else?

Physical recovery also means learning to respond to my body before discomfort becomes an emergency.

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|---|------------------------------------|--|--|
| ☐ Sleep | ☐ Nutrition | ☐ Exercise / movement | ☐ Medical care |
| ☐ Medication adherence | ☐ Rest | ☐ Pain management | ☐ Stress regulation |

Can I recognize what my body is asking for without automatically interpreting discomfort as something I need to escape?



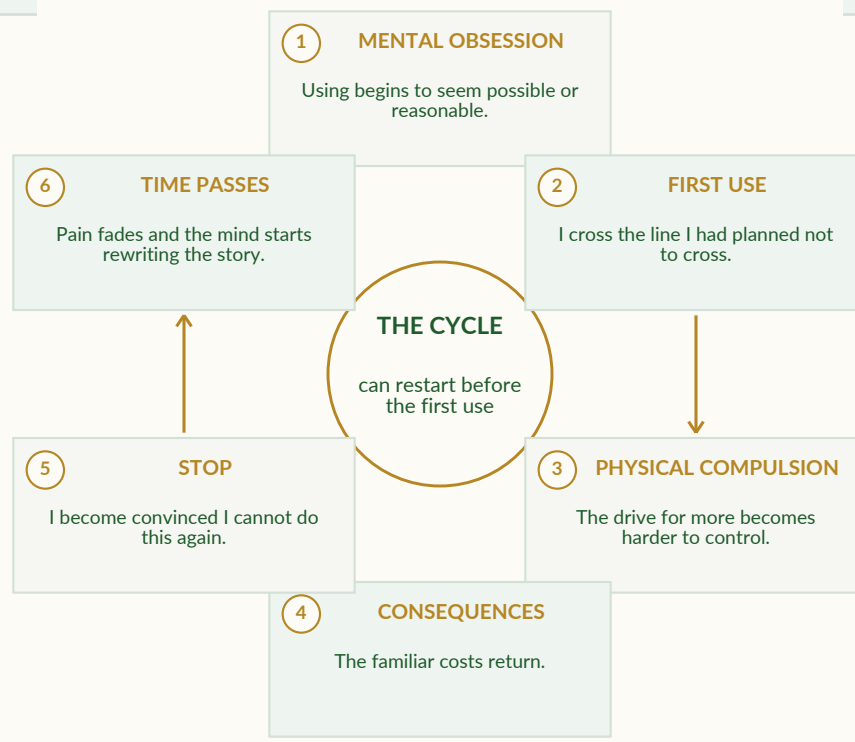
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Mental recovery: understanding the problem before the first one

If the physical problem becomes most dangerous after I start, the obvious answer seems simple: do not start. The mental dimension explains why that answer can be difficult to live. A person can know exactly what happened last time and still eventually find a reason to begin again.

The Mental Obsession

In 12-step language, the mental obsession is not simply thinking about alcohol or drugs all day. It can be the recurring mental process that eventually makes using seem reasonable again despite strong evidence that it is unsafe for me.



What does my mental obsession sound like?

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| ☐ "This time is different." | ☐ "I will only have one." | ☐ "I have been doing well." |
| ☐ "I know what I did wrong last time." | ☐ "I deserve this." | ☐ "Nobody will know." |

What are my own most convincing thoughts before unhealthy decisions?



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Spiritual recovery: meaning, values, direction, humility, and connection

The spiritual dimension is not limited to religion or faith. It includes the intangible parts of life: meaning, purpose, hope, values, integrity, humility, connection, self-respect, and the sense that my life is pointed somewhere. Addiction can narrow life until the central question becomes, "How do I feel better right now?"

From Immediate Relief to a Life With Direction

WHEN ADDICTION NARROWS LIFE

- Relief becomes the priority.
- Values become negotiable.
- Pain feels meaningless.
- Life gets organized around avoiding discomfort.
- Hope and self-respect can shrink.
- The question becomes: How do I feel better now?

WHEN RECOVERY WIDENS LIFE

- Comfort is not the only goal.
- Values guide decisions.
- Pain can be tolerated without defining everything.
- I reconnect with people and purpose.
- Esteem grows through esteemable action.
- The question becomes: Who am I becoming?

What Was I Trying to Escape or Fill?

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|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| ☐ Loneliness | ☐ Emptiness | ☐ Fear | ☐ Shame |
| ☐ Boredom | ☐ Disconnection | ☐ Lack of purpose | ☐ Feeling unseen |

Where did my behavior move away from my values?

Which principles do I want my recovery built around?

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|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ Honesty | ☐ Responsibility | ☐ Humility | ☐ Courage |
| ☐ Service | ☐ Integrity | ☐ Compassion | ☐ Acceptance |

What kind of person am I trying to become, and what kind of life am I trying to participate in?



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Social recovery: trust, belonging, boundaries, roles, and repair

Addiction rarely stays contained inside one person. It can reshape trust, communication, family roles, friendships, work, intimacy, responsibility, and the people we choose to be around. Social recovery is not simply having support. It is learning how to participate in relationships differently.

What Changes Between Me and Other People?

ADDICTION CAN ORGANIZE RELATIONSHIPS AROUND

- Secrecy and dishonesty
- Crisis and rescue
- Manipulation or control
- Isolation
- Enabling
- Mistrust

RECOVERY MAY REQUIRE LEARNING TO

- Ask without demanding
- Receive help
- Set boundaries
- Tolerate disagreement
- Repair trust over time
- Tell the truth sooner

HEALTHIER CONNECTION CAN LOOK LIKE

- Mutuality
- Accountability
- Belonging without performing
- Clear roles
- Consistent follow-through
- People who support growth

My Social Recovery

Who supports the person I am trying to become?

What relationship pattern creates the most risk for me right now?

What relationship needs to be strengthened, repaired, redefined, or stepped back from?

Recovery includes learning how to belong without disappearing, controlling, performing, or returning to crisis.



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The dimensions do not operate separately

A problem that feels mental may have a physical starting point. What looks like craving may begin with loneliness. What looks like irritability may be exhaustion. What feels like boredom may be a loss of meaning. The dimensions continually affect one another.

One Dimension Can Pull on the Others



Now Map One of My Own Chains

Physical: _____

Mental: _____

Social: _____

Spiritual: _____

One small recovery action can ripple outward through the other dimensions.



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Understanding why the substance became a solution before it became an obvious problem

For many people, alcohol or drugs did something useful before the costs became impossible to ignore. If I remove the substance without understanding what it was doing for me, I may be left with the same needs and fewer ways to meet them.

What Was the Substance Doing for Me?

DIMENSION	WHAT THE SUBSTANCE MAY HAVE DONE	WHAT I NEED TO BUILD IN RECOVERY
PHYSICAL	Help me sleep, relax, change energy, numb pain, reduce withdrawal, or feel comfortable in my body.	
MENTAL	Quiet thoughts, reduce anxiety, stop rumination, increase confidence, narrow attention, or provide relief from my own mind.	
SPIRITUAL	Fill emptiness, create intensity, give temporary meaning, numb shame, reduce loneliness, or make life feel easier to tolerate.	
SOCIAL	Help me fit in, socialize, feel less awkward, belong, connect, avoid conflict, or make relationships feel easier.	

Which function of the substance is still hardest for me to replace?

Recovery is not simply removing the substance. It is building healthier ways to meet the needs it was once meeting.



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Where I am today, what slips first, and what I will do next

Recovery does not require me to repair every dimension at the same speed. It does require me to notice where my recovery is becoming thin. The earlier I recognize deterioration, the more choices I have before the old solution starts looking necessary again.

My Four-Dimension Recovery Check

DIMENSION	TODAY 1-10	EARLY WARNING SIGN	ONE ACTION
Physical	____ / 10	_____ _____	_____ _____
Mental	____ / 10	_____ _____	_____ _____
Spiritual	____ / 10	_____ _____	_____ _____
Social	____ / 10	_____ _____	_____ _____

Which dimension tends to slip first for me?

What warning sign do I usually notice too late?

What is one action I can take in the next 24 hours?

I do not have to fix every dimension at once. I do need to be honest about what needs attention and take the next healthy action.