



**LIFE SKILLS TO STRENGTHEN
YOUR RECOVERY**



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Addiction takes a toll on your body, mind and spirit. Mastering recovery depends on repairing the damage and doing everything you can to move forward in healthy ways. The first step of recovery is getting a handle on the various aspects of your life that are essential to well-being and participation in the community. These include your home life, your relationships and your ability to participate in society.¹

We'll look at the most essential life skills that will go a long way toward preventing relapse and improving your chances of long-term recovery.

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SELF-CARE SKILLS

An article published in the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* stresses that excellent self-care is absolutely crucial to successful recovery.² A lack of self-care is a major factor in relapse. Unfortunately, some people confuse self-care with selfishness. But taking good care of yourself is far from selfish; after all, if you aren't good to yourself, it's difficult to be good to others.

One of the most important life skills in recovery is taking good care of yourself. Here's what that means.

Sleep

Adequate sleep is very important for good physical and mental health. During sleep, your body repairs itself. Your brain does important work, including organizing and compartmentalizing your memories. Adequate sleep helps keep your mood stable during the day, and it reduces stress. A good night's sleep is essential for overall good health and well-being.

Develop a bedtime routine so that you're going to bed and getting up around the same time each day. Avoid caffeine later in the day, and don't eat a lot before bed. Sleep in a dark, cool room for the highest quality of sleep. If you suffer from insomnia, talk to your doctor.



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Exercise

Exercise offers incredible benefits for people in recovery. An enormous body of research shows that exercise:

- ◆ Reduces stress
- ◆ Eases cravings
- ◆ Reduces feelings of anxiety and depression
- ◆ Improves self-esteem and self-confidence
- ◆ Improves sleep
- ◆ Helps you maintain a healthy weight
- ◆ Improves your overall health and well-being

Getting 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise most days of the week is ideal for getting the best benefits from exercise. A brisk walk, a bike ride, swimming some laps, a game of basketball and even pulling weeds in the garden are good ways to get exercise.



Eat Well

Good nutrition helps repair the damage done to your body by drugs or alcohol. The National Institutes of Health stresses the importance of eating healthy food in recovery.³ A nutritious diet makes you feel healthy and strong and promotes other healthy lifestyle choices. A healthy diet also helps you:

- ◆ Maintain a stable mood
- ◆ Ward off cravings
- ◆ Maintain good overall health
- ◆ Keep your blood sugar stable
- ◆ Lose or maintain weight

A healthy diet is one that's mostly plant-based and includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products and lean proteins like poultry and pork. Nuts, seeds, beans and legumes provide essential nutrients. Adequate hydration keeps your body's systems functioning optimally. For the most part, avoid packaged foods and fast food, which have fewer nutrients than whole foods and contain loads of added sugar and chemical colors, flavors and preservatives.



Meditate

According to a study published in the *Journal of Addiction Medicine*, daily meditation helps people manage a wide range of conditions, including addiction.⁴ Meditation promotes mindful responses to stress and helps you build stress-management skills. It also improves symptoms of depression and anxiety and reduces negative emotions.

Meditation doesn't have to be complicated. Sit quietly and comfortably and breathe slowly, training your focus on the breath entering and exiting your body in the present moment. When conscious thoughts enter, send them gently away and bring your attention back to the present, to your breath. After a couple of weeks, it will become easier to keep thoughts at bay. Strive to meditate for 10 minutes each day to start, and work your way up to a half hour or more.

Reduce Stress

Stress is a powerful trigger for relapse. Reducing stress is a major focus in treatment, and it should be a strong focus in early solo recovery as well. There are many ways to reduce stress, including these four big ones:

- ♦ **Take up a hobby.** Engaging in hobbies reduces stress. It also gives your life meaning, prevents boredom and helps you express yourself in positive ways.
- ♦ **Manage your time.** Good time-management skills are essential for keeping stress at bay. Plan the next day each evening. Schedule your time so that you don't find yourself running late or running out of time to get things done, which can cause undue stress.
- ♦ **Relax.** Relaxation is crucial in recovery, especially early on. Spend time each day relaxing. Hang out with people you enjoy, read on the patio, listen to music, make art or take a leisurely walk around the neighborhood.
- ♦ **Breathe.** When you feel stressed, take a few moments to do some deep breathing exercises. Breathing slowly and deeply reduces blood levels of the stress hormone cortisol immediately, reducing your blood pressure and heart rate.

MINDFULNESS IN RECOVERY
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Stay Mindful

Mindfulness in recovery keeps you focused on the present moment and your current feelings, emotions, attitudes, thoughts and behaviors. Staying mindful is one of the best ways to prevent relapse. To improve mindfulness:

- ◆ **Meditate.** Regular meditation has been shown to improve mindfulness in daily life.
- ◆ **Practice yoga.** Yoga keeps you connected to and mindful of your body, and it improves mental balance and flexibility.
- ◆ **Keep a journal.** Daily journaling helps you stay focused on the present moment and helps you work through problems and negative feelings.
- ◆ **Set an alarm.** Every hour or two during the day, take a few moments to conduct a quick self-assessment. How do you feel? Are you hungry? Cranky? Tired? Happy? Assess your mood, your thoughts, the way your body feels and how you're feeling about recovery.

A young man and woman are smiling and looking down at a bowl of fresh vegetables in a kitchen. The man is on the right, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, and the woman is on the left, wearing a grey sweater. They are both smiling and appear to be enjoying their time together. The kitchen has wooden cabinets and a range hood. A dark blue semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the bottom right of the image, containing the text "DOMESTIC SKILLS" in white capital letters.

DOMESTIC SKILLS

Domestic skills are important for keeping your surroundings in order and your home life conducive to recovery. The most important domestic skills in recovery include cleaning, meal planning, grocery shopping and cooking.

Keep it Tidy

Keeping a clean house makes it easier to spend relaxing time at home enjoying yourself. It makes you more likely to want to entertain friends, and it makes it easier to find what you're looking for, whether that's your car keys, an important document or something to wear. This reduces stress.

Ideally, you should dust and vacuum once a week and keep things picked up every day. The dishes should be done daily to keep pests from invading your kitchen, and the bathroom should be thoroughly cleaned each week for better hygiene. A chore list that includes daily and weekly jobs can help you stay on top of housework. If you live with others, divide the chores so everyone has a job to do each day.



Learn to Cook

If you don't know how to cook, learning will serve you well throughout your life. Cooking at home is not only healthier than eating out but it will also save you a lot of money. Start small. Get a cookbook for beginners and work your way through it, learning tips and techniques as you go. You may also consider taking a cooking class, which will teach you the basics. It'll also give you the opportunity to get out of the house and get to know other people.

Plan Your Meals

Planning your meals for the week ensures you're not left in a lurch where unhealthy fast food becomes your only option. Planning ahead reduces the unpleasantness of trying to decide what to have for dinner. It also saves you a considerable amount of money on groceries, since you're not stopping by the store every day and spending money on things you don't need.

Plan your meals for the week based on your cooking skills, what you like and how you live. If you don't like cooking, or if your days are very busy, plan simple meals. Consider making more than you'll need so that you can eat leftovers and cook less. Try to avoid eating pre-packaged and frozen meals, which are less healthy and generally more expensive than home cooking.



Shop for Groceries Wisely

Once your meal plan is ready, make a grocery list and stick to it at the store.

The perimeter of the grocery store is where the healthy food is located—the produce, meat and dairy—while the aisles typically carry the processed, packaged foods. Strive to buy mostly whole foods from the perimeter.

To save money on groceries, buy generic and store brands whenever possible. Join your store's customer rewards program to get special deals and save even more money. Buy bulk to get more for less, and take advantage of sales to stock up on the staples. Look at the weekly circular that comes in the mail to learn about the deals for the week.



RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

**GOOD LISTENING SKILLS
AND HONESTY WITH
OTHERS ARE TWO OF
THE MOST IMPORTANT
COMMUNICATION SKILLS.**

Repairing relationships and developing new relationships with other non-users is essential for your well-being and quality of life in recovery. Dysfunctional relationships negatively affect your emotions and behaviors and may contribute to a relapse. Improving your relationships and developing healthy new ones requires good relationship skills.

It takes time to restore old relationships, and it takes time to develop new ones. Here's how you can keep things moving along:

Learn Healthy Communication Skills

Good listening skills and honesty with others are two of the most important communication skills. When another person feels like you're really listening and trying to understand what they're saying, they're more likely to do the same for you. This leads to fewer misunderstandings and a healthier way of communicating.

Being honest with the people you communicate with is also essential. Dishonesty can cause misunderstandings and lead to other relationship problems.

Other communication skills for healthy relationships include asking questions, keeping your emotions in check, looking at situations realistically and being honest with yourself.

End Toxic Relationships

Unhealthy relationships can lead you back to using. They cause stress and negative emotions and reduce your happiness. Ending these relationships isn't always easy, but it's essential for your mental health, quality of life and sobriety. Ending unhealthy relationships opens up time to develop better, healthier relationships.

Addiction is a family disease that almost always causes dysfunction in your familial relationships.⁵ Repairing some of these important relationships may require therapy. Family therapy helps you and those close to you to work through your differences, improve communication and overcome past problems.

Develop Healthy New Relationships

Take advantage of opportunities to meet others. Join a club, league or other organization that interests you. Be yourself with new people, and be honest about your recovery if it comes up. If you're shy or have social anxiety, remember that asking the other person questions is a great way to start a conversation. You can let them do most of the talking until you feel more comfortable.





JOB SKILLS



The benefits of having a job in recovery can't be overestimated, according to an article published in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*.⁶ A job helps prevent relapse by:

- ◆ Filling time with productive activities
- ◆ Reducing financial stress
- ◆ Giving purpose to your life
- ◆ Providing the opportunity to develop healthy relationships with co-workers
- ◆ Improving self-confidence and self-esteem

But finding a job isn't always easy, depending on your skills, experience, education, employment history and legal standing. But even if the cards are stacked against you, there are a number of things you can do to improve your chances of finding a job.

Write a Resume

A good resume sets you apart from other candidates for a job. Learn how to create a resume, or have a knowledgeable friend or family member help you write one. Make absolutely sure it's free of typos. When you're satisfied, make a few copies on high-quality paper to have on hand when you need one. Keep a digital file as well so that you can tailor the objective to a particular job.

Decide What Kind of Job You'd Like

The type of job you can get will depend on your skills and experience, but narrowing it down can help you find a job you'll like. This is important for your quality of life. To help you decide what kind of job to look for, do a little journaling. Write down:

- ◆ Your goals for the future
- ◆ Your inherent values and strengths
- ◆ The kinds of tasks you enjoy
- ◆ The various industries you're interested in
- ◆ A list of jobs you think you'd like



Know Where to Look

The more job opportunities you come across, the more likely you'll be to find something that suits you. To increase your chance of finding an opening you want to apply for:

- ◆ Network with others. Let people know you're in the market for a job in the industries of your choice. If you're on social media, put the word out to your associates.
- ◆ Log on. Websites like Monster, Indeed and CareerBuilder let you search jobs by location, salary, job type and other parameters.
- ◆ Visit city, state and federal boards. Job boards for the city, state and federal government are continually updated with job opportunities at all levels.
- ◆ Consider large employers in your area. Make a list of major factories, corporate headquarters, universities, school districts and other large employers in your area. If the company has an online job board that you can subscribe to, you can get the latest openings sent to you via email. Otherwise, save the company's online job search page to your favorites folder and revisit it often.

Practice the Interview

Good interviewing skills improve your chances of getting hired. Read up on what makes an interview good. Familiarize yourself with common interview questions and plan a response to them. You can ask a friend or family member to play the role of the interviewer so that you can practice. Develop a firm handshake, and make eye contact. Take a moment to gather your thoughts before responding to a question. Be sure to thank the interviewer after the meeting.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a dark blue polka-dot blouse, is seated in a blue office chair, looking down at a laptop. The background is a blurred office environment with other desks and lights. A teal semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the bottom right of the image.

FINANCIAL SKILLS



Managing your finances helps keep stress at bay, and it improves your quality of life by fostering financial security. While you were addicted, you probably spent a hefty sum on drugs or alcohol, and you may have mismanaged your finances. Getting them in order—and keeping them that way—is an important skill in recovery.

Track Your Spending Habits

If you seem to spend more money than you have each pay period, track your spending habits for a month or two to see where you can save. Keep a spending diary and write down how much you spend, and for what. You may find that your daily coffee drink or lunch out adds up to more than you think. Apps like Mint and Penny can help you track your spending habits, develop a workable budget and keep you on track.^{7,8}

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Develop a Budget

Budgeting your money ensures you're able to cover all of the essentials like rent, gas and groceries. What's left over should allow you to put a little money in savings and cover everything else you need.

One example of a budget is the 50/30/20 budget. Fifty percent of your income goes to pay the bills and buy gasoline and groceries. Thirty percent goes toward general spending, such as clothing, dining out, entertainment and household purchases. Twenty percent goes into savings.

If you have trouble sticking to a budget using checks or your debit card, consider the cash-in-envelope method. Each month, after you've put money in savings, pay your rent and bills first thing, then divide the remaining money you have among envelopes labeled with your other expenses, like gas, dining out, clothing and entertainment. When the money in the envelope is gone, you can't spend any more on that item until payday.

Alternatively, set up direct deposit so your money goes straight to the bank. Set up automatic withdrawal for as many of your expenses as possible, including savings. What's left is for other expenses, and it should last until your next payday.



Improve Your Credit Score

A good credit score enables you to secure auto, home and student loans. It can help you get an apartment, cell phone, utilities and low interest rates on credit cards. Improving your credit takes time, but these simple tips can help:

- ◆ Order your credit report, and check it for accuracy. Report any incorrect information, including wrong addresses, to the credit bureau.
- ◆ Get current with any past-due accounts you have.
- ◆ Reduce your credit card balances, and keep them low.
- ◆ Pay your bills on time.

Visit a Financial Counselor

Financial counseling can help you assess your spending habits, create a realistic, workable budget, pay off debts sooner and improve your credit score. Be aware that some "credit counseling" firms may not be reputable. To find a reputable firm, and for excellent advice on budgeting, managing your credit and getting out of debt, visit the National Foundation for Credit Counseling.⁹ This non-profit organization helps people get out of debt and stay in the black.



**RECOVERY IS ABOUT
IMPROVING YOUR LIFE**

Recovery is less about forcing yourself to abstain from drugs and alcohol than it is about improving your life in countless ways so that you no longer "need" drugs or alcohol to feel safe, healthy and happy. Mastering these essential life skills sooner rather than later will dramatically improve your life on many fronts so that you can focus most of your attention on enjoying your life and living it to the fullest.



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Located in beautiful rural Pennsylvania, Silvermist offers individualized treatment for substance use and mental health disorders. Silvermist sets the standard for addiction treatment on the East Coast by providing men and women a beautiful and discreet environment filled with all the amenities that support early recovery. Silvermist is grounded in the highest clinical standards and is committed to clinical integrity, community and education.

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