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Introduction

Making the decision to enter treatment for a substance use disorder isn't easy, but it can transform your life. In most cases, willpower and good intentions are not enough to overcome an addiction. Treatment is usually needed to end the cycle of remission and relapse that commonly plagues someone with an addiction. That's because addiction is a complex disease that changes the structures and functions of the brain and affects behavior in a number of important ways.

Therapy is the cornerstone of treatment, and a holistic program will offer a variety of therapies to help you work through underlying issues, difficult emotions and unhappy experiences that, left unresolved, can undermine your physical and mental health.

Here, we'll look at how therapy takes place in a treatment program. We'll offer an overview of common treatment therapies—both traditional and complementary—and explain how they can help you create a better future for yourself.



In treatment, therapy takes place in individual, group and family settings.

Individual Therapy

Individual therapy takes place in a one-on-one setting with the client and the therapist. It helps you develop the specific coping skills you need to maintain long-term sobriety. Individual therapy focuses on your unique issues and problems. The confidential nature of individual therapy enables you to discuss sensitive issues that you might not be willing bring up with a group.



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Group Therapy

Therapy that takes place in group settings capitalizes on the social reinforcement that comes from peer discussion.² Therapy groups usually include five to 15 people who discuss a range of issues and share personal experiences.

Benefits of group therapy include:

- Receiving support and encouragement from peers who are in similar circumstances
- Getting various perspectives on a situation to help you deal with problems more effectively
- Promoting social skills and easing feelings of isolation
- Sharing coping skills and tips for solving a range of problems
- Having a safe, supportive place to vent emotions and work through issues

Group therapy sessions are facilitated by a trained therapist who helps guide the conversation and keep it productive by asking open-ended questions that lead to group-generated solutions.



Family Therapy

Addiction is a disease that indelibly affects the family system. By middle age, you may have a spouse and children who have likely developed unhealthy coping behaviors in response to the chaos, fear and uncertainty addiction brings to the household. The most common of these behaviors are the result of codependency and enabling. Once the family member is in recovery, however, these unhealthy behaviors don't necessarily end. Identifying and replacing them with healthier ways of coping is crucial for healing the family system.



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Codependency is an excessive reliance on a dysfunctional relationship. Common codependent behaviors include:

- Trying to solve the addicted person's problems
- Neglecting your needs and the needs of others in the household while attending to the addicted individual's needs
- Tolerating unhealthy behaviors directed at you
- Ignoring your gut instincts while trusting what the addicted person tells you

Enabling behaviors help the addicted individual continue using drugs or alcohol by removing or buffering the consequences of the addiction. Enabling behaviors include:

- Using with the addicted person so you can "keep an eye" on them
- Giving the addicted person money or bailing them out of jail
- Rationalizing bad behavior
- Making excuses so the addicted person doesn't suffer consequences, such as by calling in sick for them when they can't make it to work due to using



For the family system to become functional, each member needs to identify their own unhealthy coping behaviors and replace them with healthier ways of coping. They need to learn the best ways to support their loved one while taking care of their own needs.

By restoring healthy communication and replacing unhealthy ways of thinking and behaving, the family becomes functional again. Relationships improve and the living environment becomes less chaotic and stressful, and this balance and growing peace contribute to successful ongoing recovery.



There is no single pathway to recovery that works for every individual.³ A high-quality treatment program will offer a range of therapies that address issues of body, mind and spirit. An enormous body of research shows that this type of holistic approach improves the outcome of treatment by approaching numerous issues from a variety of angles.

Engaging in both traditional and complementary therapies broadens the scope of treatment. Especially in middle age, a holistic treatment program can transform your life, bringing about higher self-awareness and a better sense of well-being.







Traditional therapies are those that have long been used and proven successful. These are generally research-based psychotherapies that involve talking to a therapist either one-on-one or in a group setting. Cognitive-behavioral therapy, psychoeducational groups and nutrition support are commonly used traditional therapies in treatment.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is the most common therapy used in the treatment of addiction, and it takes place in both group and individual settings. In CBT, you'll delve into the various issues that underlie your addiction. You'll learn to identify unhealthy thought and behavior patterns and replace these with healthier ways of thinking and behaving.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy has a positive impact in all areas of your life. It can help you find purpose and meaning, and it helps you work through any unresolved trauma. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is also essential for developing a toolkit of coping skills to help you weather cravings, manage your stress and handle other powerful triggers for relapse.

Psychoeducational Groups

Psychoeducational groups are a type of group therapy designed to educate clients about substance abuse to expand their awareness about its psychological, medical and behavioral consequences. The information provided through these groups promotes greater self-awareness and prompts clients to take action to address their substance use disorder. It identifies community resources that can help promote long-term abstinence and helps clients understand the process of recovery.



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In many cases, psychoeducational groups help clients move out of denial, increase their commitment to ongoing treatment and recovery and change unhealthy behaviors associated with substance abuse. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, psychoeducational groups are very useful for:4

- Helping clients understand the deep impact of substance abuse on their lives and develop intrinsic motivation to seek help and make meaningful changes to promote successful recovery
- Helping people learn about their addiction and recognize the challenges of recovery to help them forge a path to follow for successful recovery
- Helping families understand their loved one's addiction and how to best support them in recovery, as well as identify any unhealthy coping behaviors they've developed as a result of the addiction
- Identifying a range of resources available to help clients in their recovery journey
- Offering strategies and techniques that promote successful ongoing recovery, such as meditation, stress reduction, anger management, spiritual development and good nutrition



Nutritional Support

Good health is a cornerstone of successful recovery, and good nutrition is essential for physical and mental well-being. Substance abuse takes a toll on your body's organs and systems, but much of the damage can be repaired and good health restored through a healthy diet.

Nutritional support is a crucial component of treatment. Understanding how your diet affects your physical and mental health and learning how to choose and prepare healthy foods can make an enormous difference in your well-being. Making healthy choices in recovery includes choosing the optimal diet for your individual needs, whether you need to gain, lose or maintain weight, manage a co-occurring disease like diabetes or hypertension or improve your overall health.



Complementary therapies are those that are outside of the mainstream but which have been shown to be beneficial for treating a wide range of diseases and conditions. Some common complementary therapies include yoga, acupuncture and nature therapy. These therapies complement traditional treatment through their holistic and often spiritual approach.

Some complementary therapies, like outdoor therapies and equine therapy, are experiential, involving hands-on activities that help clients work through a wide range of emotions and experiences. Other therapies, like yoga and meditation, are based on Eastern philosophies and are more spiritual in nature.

People of all ages benefit from complementary therapies. However, middle adulthood is generally a time of spiritual awakening, and many of these therapies help adults in their thirties and up identify their inherent strengths and dearest values and use these to find purpose, meaning and authentic happiness in life.

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Equine Therapy

Equine-assisted psychotherapy, which involves working with horses, helps clients work through unexpressed emotions, ease psychological distress, change self-destructive behavior patterns and live more fully in the present moment.

Horses elicit a range of behaviors and emotions in humans, and this encourages self-awareness and personal growth. Clients relate to the vigilance of horses and their impulse to escape when they're frightened or feel threatened, and they interpret the horse's movements and behaviors as they relate to and mirror their own physical and emotional states.

In equine therapy, clients choose a horse and are responsible for grooming and leading the animal. They learn to ride, and they play equine games. A therapist helps the clients make important connections through role-playing, role-reversal and other activities.

Especially once you move out of your twenties and significant life events and relationships have left behind feelings of conflict and negative emotions, equine therapy is a valuable activity that has been shown through research to improve feelings of well-being. In one study, participants in an equine therapy group reported being more oriented in the present, less burdened by guilt and regret, less fearful about the future and more self-aware than before. These changes were stable at a six-month follow-up.



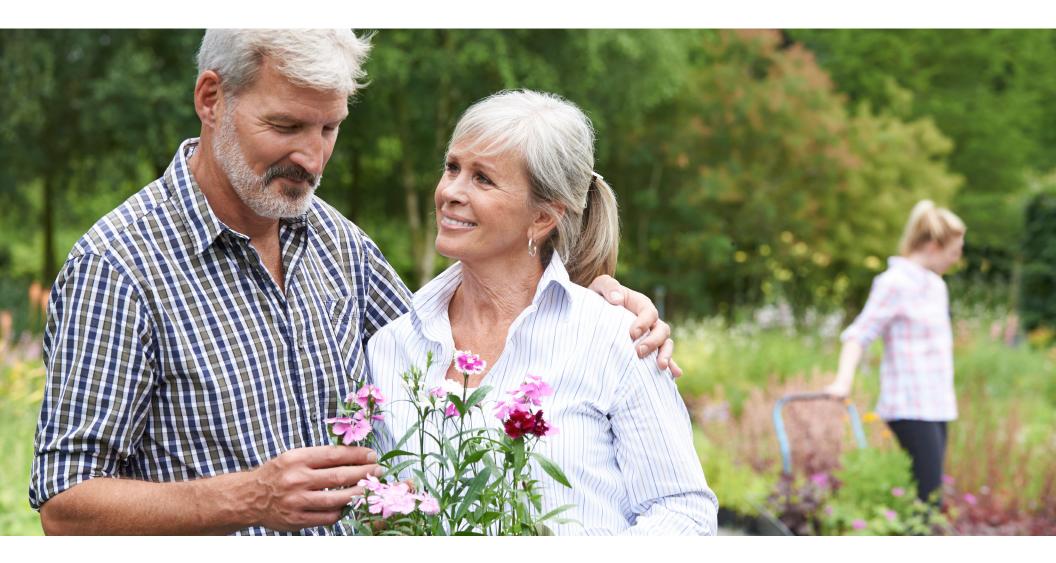
Horticultural Therapy

Horticultural therapy involves engaging clients in gardening activities that promote holistic healing through a connection with nature. Research shows that horticultural therapy has relaxing and restorative benefits for a range of diseases and conditions, including addiction.⁶

During horticultural therapy, a trained therapist helps to connect horticultural activities with treatment goals. The therapeutic benefits of working with plants include:

- An increase in attention span and focus
- Better communication skills
- Increased social interaction in and outside of the group
- Improved self-confidence, self-esteem and self-awareness
- Feelings of interest and enthusiasm
- Relieving aggression and tension
- Lower blood pressure, heart rate and stress levels

The specific skills learned in horticultural therapy can be applied at home. A great deal of focus in addiction treatment is on helping clients find activities that are enjoyable and rewarding and relieve stress and offer a sense of purpose and meaning. Gardening is one such activity that can help people in recovery bring pleasure and enjoyment to their life.





Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

Trauma—especially that which occurs in childhood or adolescence--is a major factor in developing an addiction. One in four children and adolescents in the U.S. experience trauma before the age of sixteen.⁷ It's estimated that one in three people seeking treatment for a substance use disorder are suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

Regardless of when a trauma occurred, addressing it is crucial for the best possible outcome of treatment. Trauma-sensitive yoga is one way in which trauma can be successfully addressed.

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One factor in recovering from trauma is learning to self-regulate emotions and find ways to calm the mind and body, and yoga practice has been shown through research to be a highly effective therapy for doing just that. One study found that after eight weeks of trauma-sensitive yoga practice, participants showed improvements in all areas of PTSD and enjoyed significant gains in body attunement and overall vitality.8

Trauma-sensitive yoga is a specialized practice that involves engaging the mind, body and spirit in the healing process. It takes place in a safe, private setting that's designed to help participants feel less vulnerable. External noise is blocked as much as possible, mirrors are absent and the lighting is soft but not dark. Participants are encouraged to take control over their experience and are guided through poses and breathing exercises that promote mindfulness and body-awareness. Trained instructors are present, positive and approachable, and they encourage participants to listen to and develop a gentle relationship with their bodies.

Middle-aged clients in particular find yoga to be an empowering practice in itself, opening spiritual pathways and increasing feelings of good health and psychological well-being.

Meditation

Meditation is becoming an increasingly mainstream practice as its benefits are identified through research. Practicing meditation increases your ability to control your alpha brain waves, which improves your ability to focus and helps you regulate how external events affect you. Meditation reduces stress, and it even helps your body learn to better respond to stressors. With regular practice, it promotes a higher level of spirituality, self-awareness, inner peace and calmness. These effects are powerful and long-lasting.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is the ancient Chinese practice of inserting long, thin needles into the skin at specific points to stimulate the flow of energy through your body and promote the release of feel-good brain chemicals like epinephrine, serotonin and dopamine, which produce feelings of calm and well-being. Acupuncture is particularly useful during the detoxification process, which can put the body under a great deal of stress. It's also been found to reduce feelings of grief, ease fear, decrease anxiety and promote relaxation.¹⁰

Wilderness and Nature Therapy

Wilderness therapy, or nature therapy, is an experiential treatment that takes place in nature. Wilderness experiences may range from hiking and overnight camping to spending an entire month on a wilderness survival exercise.

A large body of research shows that wilderness and nature experiences are extremely valuable for helping addicted individuals work through their unique issues and discover their inherent strengths. They gain self-confidence as they successfully accomplish various tasks, and they become more aware of their thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. Working together in nature is also known to improve decision-making, communication and coping skills.

One study found that outdoor adventure therapy helps lower relapse rates, eases the intensity of cravings and reduces the frequency of negative thoughts.¹¹ Getting back to nature also helps clients appreciate the simple things in life, and many feel cleansed and renewed after this type of experience.





Treatment for a substance use disorder isn't just about ending an addiction. It's about improving your life in countless ways to help ensure long-term successful recovery. It's about bringing joy back into the mix, finding purpose and meaning in your life and enjoying authentic happiness outside of drugs and alcohol.

Quality treatment programs that take a holistic approach to recovery by integrating traditional and alternative therapies enjoy better treatment outcomes. These programs accomplish this by addressing the whole person—body, mind and spirit—and offering a variety of ways to approach a range of issues. This can be a highly transformative process, and it can lead to a vastly higher quality of life.

It may be hard right now to imagine a life without using, but once you reconnect with your true self and rediscover all of the joys life offers, it may be hard to imagine wanting to use again.



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