

Fortifying Your Strength Against Relapse

by Batista Gremaud

In part one of this series, we looked at the relapse process and one of its triggers, which is relationships. Today, we'll look at a second offender to watch out for in recovery: stress.

Stress: The relationship between stress and addictions has long been established. Acute stress can lead to drug abuse in vulnerable individuals and increase the risk of relapse in recovering addicts. Stress response hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol are released via the sympathetic nervous system. The heart rate increases, causing blood vessels to constrict and blood pressure to increase as a result of the fight and flight response. The recovering individual might be more susceptible to stress due to the way that alcohol and drug abuse has changed brain chemistry. This may also explain why some individuals relapse in response to situations that would only be considered mildly stressful by others. Long-term, fulfilling sobriety happens by attaining emotional sobriety, which requires the ability to remain calm and centered under stress. The compulsive addictive way is to feel, overreact and think about consequences later.

The healthy mind uses clear thinking:

1. Feel the emotion
2. Think first of how to respond and evaluate possible outcomes
3. Take appropriate action

In time, this process will lead to a complete lifestyle change through habit modification. Example: substituting good food rather than unhealthy food that could possibly affect mood behavior because of allergic reactions to the foods eaten; substituting harmful substances for natural supplementation. Avoiding getting too hungry, angry, lonely and tired, as referred to by the acronym H.A.L.T.

This might be easier said than done, especially for the individual who has lost a tremendous amount of functional strength and is already frazzled because the nervous system is overloaded. Strengthening the nervous system is a key component to emotional sobriety.

Treatment centers incorporate stress management courses and other interventions aimed at helping addicts more successfully manage their stress by focusing on social support, problem solving and coping skills. Some are beginning to incorporate tools such as yoga or meditation for the purpose of calming the mind. However, the nervous system is an organ of the body and requires to be strengthened, much like a muscle, so to speak. While these tools offer great benefits physically and emotionally,



they do not increase one's functional strength by 20% to 50% in 20 minutes, like strength training can, which immediately fortifies the nervous system, quiets the mind and produces a massive amount of endorphins being released into the brain by way of the blood expansion being pumped throughout the body's circulatory system. This is known to elevate mood behaviors while physically getting stronger and healthier.

Every trait of character can be used for a positive or negative outcome. One characteristic of the addict mind is the pursuit of instant gratification. Why not then turn this trait of character into a positive and use it towards recovery by choosing an activity that enhances it while providing fast benefits? Unlike aerobic activities and yoga, strength training uses specific muscle fibers and muscle contractions that allow for immediate functional strength increase. It is a safe sport that enables you to go at your own pace and level of athleticism, provides fast and measurable results and an instant sense of well being, by quieting the mind. Exercise becomes a desired fun activity rather than one more thing on the to-do list.

Fast becoming the number one anti-aging sport because of its amazing overall health benefits, strength training assists in rebuilding the alcoholic brain by increasing neurogenesis, and enables you to become more balanced physically and emotionally as, it stimulates the release of endorphins and neurotransmitters that help to relieve stress response and fight against depression. It serves as a form of meditation that takes the mind off stress factors.

Strength training is a revolutionary weapon that when incorporated into one's schedule will manifest such positive changes as mentioned in this article.