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Fundamental Factors of Success in Addiction Recovery

While there isn't yet a cure, these factors can set recovery on the right path.

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If you or someone you love has struggled with [addiction](#), you know how difficult it is to get and stay clean. The road to recovery doesn't go in only one direction, and as hard as it may be to accept, setbacks and relapses are part of the process. Although we all wish it were different, professionals in the field of addiction treatment don't have a cure to offer. We do, however, have important information about the factors that improve the likelihood of long-term recovery. There's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all recovery model, but the available research suggests that some factors are essential. Regardless of what form of treatment you receive or what kind of program you work, here are the fundamentals:

Readiness to Change. If you know anything about recovery, you know this one's a no-brainer. No matter how bad things have gotten, no matter how much other people want you to change, if you're not ready, it's not happening. The truth is, it's hard to take the first step. Sometimes even misery can seem safer than change, so taking action to do things differently is a courageous and commendable act.

Belief in the Ability to Overcome Challenges. In psychology, we call this [self-efficacy](#). It's basically a fancy term that refers to a person's belief that he or she can make things happen. When it comes to recovery, this is crucial. Once you've decided to get clean, you have to have a conviction that you can actually do it. This, of course, can be challenging, as past experiences may make it hard to see that change is possible. But every day clean and sober is an occasion to feel a little stronger, a little more capable. The beautiful thing about self-efficacy is that it builds on itself; the more positive changes you create, the more capable you feel, and the more capable you feel, the more energy you have to keep the positive changes going.

Maintenance of Psychological and Emotional Wellness. There's a strong link that binds addiction, [anxiety](#), and [depression](#). Research shows that mental and emotional wellness are essential to a solid recovery program. Addressing the addiction without attending to any other dimensions of mental [health](#) is ineffective. People in recovery who suffer from untreated anxiety or depression tend not to stay clean for very long. When their symptoms become overwhelming, they seek relief; and since their brains are primed to seek a particular type of relief—in the form of their drug(s) of choice—it's often only a matter of time before the untreated mental health issues result in relapse.

Support. This one cannot be understated. Study after study has shown that interpersonal support is essential to recovery. It isn't easy to get and stay sober. Being in recovery, especially at first, can be terrifying and isolating. That's why it's so important to be surrounded by people who understand you; know what you're going through; and are willing to stay by your side, cheering you on and keeping you focused when the going gets tough. Check out [this TED talk](#) from Johann Hari, which offers a thought-provoking perspective on why support and connection are so vital to recovery.

Structure. Life in active addiction is often uncertain, unbalanced, unstructured, and unpredictable. That's why a structured environment and routine are cornerstones of a successful recovery program. The research evidence and my experiences with clients make a strong case for the importance of setting

up a clear structure and sticking to it. This means having a consistent routine and adhering to it every day. It means establishing a sense of organization and order with regard to daily tasks and responsibilities. It means attending to the basic activities of daily life, keeping a simple daily schedule that you can stick to, maintaining a balanced lifestyle, and making sure sobriety remains a priority. It might sound like a lot, but with a little help from the right supports, it's completely possible, and it makes all the difference in the world.

Productivity. The last, but certainly not least, quality of a successful recovery program is productivity. Everyone who's ever attempted sobriety can attest to the fact that boredom is a major trigger with enormous relapse potential. That's why it's so important to stay busy. The research suggests that people who engage in productive and meaningful activities tend to stay sober for longer. Whether it's working at a [job](#), engaging in a hobby, doing physical exercise, playing in an intramural [sports](#) league, fellowshipping at meetings, or volunteering in the community, staying productive is key to staying sober.

While this list contains proven factors that contribute to a solid recovery program, it's by no means exhaustive. If you're new to recovery, it's important to engage the support of a sponsor or mental health professional with experience in addiction. You are not alone, and yes, you can do this!