Cleaning Up Your Act

For a chemically dependent person, the first step toward recovery is recognizing that there's a problem. The second step is to quit using the chemical, whether it's alcohol or another drug. Unless the chemicals are gotten out of the way, the chemically dependent person never can know which problems in life are drug-related and which aren't. Getting sober involves the body and the mind. Learning about the process can help make it easier to start and maintain.

Body
Getting sober starts with the body. If you've been dependent on alcohol or drugs, your body has gotten used to the substance, and will take some time to adjust to sobriety. If you've been using alcohol, cocaine, depressants or narcotics, it's best to have medical help, either from a treatment center or a doctor experienced in chemical dependency issues. For other substances, it's safe to "just quit."

You can help your body adjust to sobriety by exercising, eating nutritious foods and getting plenty of rest. Exercise is generally healthful, and also produces endorphins, a natural body chemical which helps relieve anxiety and increase positive feelings.

It's best to build up a regular exercise program, starting small, and gradually increasing the amount you do. Be moderate. It's possible to become obsessive about exercise or injure yourself by exercising too much.

Good nutrition requires lots of fresh vegetables, fruits and complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains. Processed foods, additives, refined sugar, caffeine and high-fat foods should be avoided. Caffeine and sugar, in particular, may tend to increase cravings for drugs or alcohol.

Getting plenty of rest is also important, as sleep helps you adjust psychologically to living a sober life. You may have trouble sleeping at first. If so, try getting more exercise.

Mind
Becoming sober involves breaking old habits that contributed to chemical dependency, learning to solve problems that chemicals allowed you to ignore and learning chemical-free ways to manage stress. We recommend the following:

- Think about and list situations that “trigger” you to take your drug. If possible, avoid them.
- Practice meditation, visualization or other relaxation techniques to manage stress.
- Think about the roles your friends play in your life. If some friends don’t support you in sobriety, avoid their company and seek out new ones who will.
- Join a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. Your employee assistance program can refer you to local groups which can help you maintain and enjoy sobriety. Or check your local telephone directory.

It's Your Life
In chemical dependency, your drug controls a big piece of your life. In sobriety, you get your life back, and can begin the process of making it into the life you want.