



In  
Times

Illness<sup>of</sup>

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## Preface

The *In Times of Illness* booklet was approved by the World Service Conference in 1992. Since its publication, members throughout our fellowship have utilized this booklet as a resource when confronted with an illness or injury in recovery. The Fellowship of NA, the medical community, and the world are in a constant state of change. Through the years, many members found that the experience given in the booklet no longer met the needs of our growing fellowship. Workshops held worldwide indicated that members, collectively, wanted suggestions on dealing with issues such as mental health disorders, medication, and chronic illness in recovery. Our goal is to address these concerns and continue to carry our message to the addict who still suffers.

This revised booklet offers the shared experience of many members who live with illness and maintain their recovery in NA. As our fellowship matures, so does our experience with life issues. Illness and injury are life issues that can invoke fear and uncertainty in addicts. We offer support to members who relapse with medication taken for an illness, and we share the experience of many members who are required to take prescribed medication and keep their recovery intact. Through the process of working the steps, we learn about ourselves. We come to know our own defects of character and recognize the tendency to minimize or overemphasize events in our lives. We can apply this knowledge, along with the solutions we find through the steps, to any situation we face. Based on these principles, this booklet offers

practical suggestions for living a life in recovery and living with an illness, injury, or mental health disorder. We encourage members to use the information and ideas offered to better understand and support one another, not to chastise one another.

The information in this booklet is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice, nor should it be used to make decisions regarding healthcare treatment without consulting professionals. Our literature tells us that when we sought help for our addiction through medicine, religion, and psychiatry, these methods were not sufficient for us. However, there will be times when we face an illness or injury that can be successfully treated by professionals. Our goal is to responsibly seek treatment for medical conditions while we acknowledge that we are recovering addicts with the disease of addiction.

This booklet is not designed to address every possible situation we may encounter, and there are many other pieces of NA literature that may help, too. Basic concepts we can learn through working the steps and core spiritual principles of our program are repeated often throughout this booklet. This is intentional. We designed it for an addict who is facing an illness or injury and who may want to seek out the section that applies to their situation and gain valuable insight without having to read the entire piece. Health problems are personal, and each situation will differ depending on the individual. What we offer here is simply the experience, strength, and hope of many members who have faced illness and injury during their recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

# Informing Our Healthcare Providers



*“...we accept responsibility for our problems and see that we’re equally responsible for our solutions.”*

BASIC TEXT

We are responsible for our recovery, but there may be times when a team of healthcare providers will administer our medical care. We have a right and responsibility to participate as an equal partner by informing our healthcare providers of our needs. It is vital to carefully consider all options presented to us. Professionals will have difficulty providing us with adequate care unless we are honest with them. We apply basic safeguards that will protect our recovery when we are seeing a medical professional; it is usually in our best interest to inform them that we are recovering addicts.

- ⊗ Explain that abstinence from mind- or mood-altering medication is our goal in recovery.
- ⊗ Consider and discuss alternative treatments and smaller doses when a prescription for mind-changing or mood-altering medication is offered.
- ⊗ Take our sponsor or a trusted NA friend with us when we are going to the doctor.

In the event that we encounter medical professionals who do not understand the disease of addiction, we take the opportunity to share with them about



our recovery. This will help them provide us with safe and effective medical treatment. Some medical professionals may misunderstand us and attempt to treat our addiction. Or, they may be overly cautious and reluctant to prescribe medication when they learn that we are addicts. We can explain that we have the NA program to help with our addiction, and we need their help with treatment of our medical condition. We also need to remember that it is okay to ask the doctor questions. It is important to be our own advocate. If we feel like we don't have enough information, or that the doctor does not seem to be respectful of our situation, we can seek another medical opinion.

*“My experience with dentists is no different from other doctors who treat pain. As a result of neglecting my teeth, I have had to make numerous visits to the dentist for procedures that caused intense pain. My dentist, on several occasions, offered me pain medication to take at home which I didn't find necessary. Instead, I accepted the practical experience of other members and found relief with ice packs, rides to and from appointments, and nonprescription medication.”*

Our experience shows that we may want to consider taking another person with us when meeting with a doctor. Having another person listen while the doctor describes proposed procedures or treatments can offer us support and reassurance. If necessary, their presence can be explained to the doctor by



saying that the support of others is an integral part of our program of recovery. Medical issues often produce a reaction of anxiety. The person who accompanies us can hear the details with an open mind, while our own minds may be clouded with fear, anger, or self-pity. We select this person based on the fact that they are our sponsor or a trusted NA friend, and it is important to remain open-minded to the suggestions that they may offer.

*“A woman I sponsor was scheduled to have major surgery. She felt shame and was afraid that the medical personnel would treat her differently if she told them she was an addict. Rather than lose face, she was willing to risk her recovery. She shared those feelings with me. I helped her to see that it was important to walk through the fear and inform the medical personnel of her addiction. She chose to be honest with her doctor. As a result, her recovery was strengthened rather than jeopardized.”*

Ideally, working closely with healthcare professionals and a sponsor can help us keep our illness and treatment in perspective. Reaching out and sharing honestly with those we trust and respect is vital. We may want to seek out the experience of NA friends who have faced similar situations in their recovery. Maintaining rigorous honesty and remaining open to the suggestions of other addicts allows us to avoid self-deception or secrecy. Our experience shows that we are especially vulnerable to our addiction when we are dealing with illness and injury. We consider asking for a limited supply of medication and we talk to our sponsor before filling a prescription for mind- or mood-altering medication. Our sponsor and

trusted NA friends can help us make decisions based in recovery principles. They remind us that taking medication as prescribed for an illness is not the same as using. It is essential to maintain rigorous honesty and responsibility with our sponsor and allow our medical team, our NA support network, and our Higher Power to guide us.

## Medication in Recovery

*“For all the diversity of individual opinion among our members, Narcotics Anonymous itself is united in having no opinion on any issues apart from its own program. As a fellowship, we agree to take positions only on those ideas that have drawn us together, our principles of recovery, not on the many personal opinions that might divide us.”*

IT WORKS: HOW AND WHY

Narcotics Anonymous as a whole has no opinion on outside issues, and this includes health issues. We are concerned with recovery from the disease of addiction. Our collective experience shows that rigorous application of the program is our best defense against relapse. However, we may face a situation in our recovery where we have to make choices about medication. The use of medication can be controversial in our fellowship. When treatment of an illness requires medication, the concept of abstinence can be confusing. It's helpful to remember the importance of making a conscious decision not to medicate ourselves or treat our own illnesses.

*“I was one person who believed that, if you used anything for any reason, it was considered a relapse. Until I was faced with this situation in my own recovery, it didn’t dawn on me that I might have to take medication. I can remember going to meetings and having people ask me if I’d relapsed, and telling me to pick up a white chip. This really hurt and scared me. I felt rejected and very alone because no one seemed to understand that I needed strength and hope.”*

The Basic Text recommends consulting professionals concerning our medical problems. We also work closely with our sponsor and other experienced NA members we trust. Many members today have experience with illness and medication in recovery. We can look to their example and listen to their experience to help us face our fears about medication. We remember that we are especially vulnerable to our old ways of thinking when we are in pain. Prayer, meditation, and sharing can help us keep our minds off our discomfort. Addicts are often surprised to discover how much pain we can tolerate without medication. Reaching out and sharing honestly with those we trust can help us keep our priorities in order. Our goal is to maintain our recovery.

**It’s helpful to remember the importance of making a conscious decision not to medicate ourselves or treat our own illnesses.**

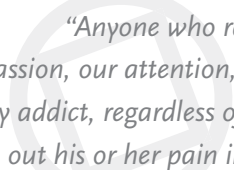


Cleantime is an issue for each of us to resolve individually with our sponsor and our Higher Power. The ultimate responsibility for making medical decisions rests with each member. However, the guidance and support of members who have faced similar situations is often available if we reach out. In addition to consulting medical professionals, we may use other members' experience and information to help us make knowledgeable decisions. We can practice the Twelve Steps, maintain frequent contact with our sponsor, write about our feelings and motives, and share with our NA friends. With the support of others in Narcotics Anonymous, we find the strength we need to make healthy choices for our own recovery.

*“When I came to NA, all I wanted to do was stop using drugs; NA showed me how. My recovery in NA helped prepare me to face an illness. I discussed my illness with informed medical professionals and obtained second and third opinions. Every medical treatment involved mind- and mood-altering medication. Prior to taking pain medication, I discussed all options with my sponsor. During that period of time I kept my NA friends close and my sponsor informed.”*

We have found that it is important for addicts to have at least one person with whom they can be completely honest. This person can be a sponsor, recovering family member, or trusted NA friend. The important thing is that someone who has specific

knowledge of the disease of addiction can help us to avoid isolation and secrecy. Members facing illness and injury may face intense feelings of loneliness, despair, and self-pity. We learn that pain shared is pain lessened in NA, and encourage others to reach out to us. By listening to the experience, strength, and hope in meetings we are able to experience collective empathy. We fulfill our primary purpose by offering our support to other addicts with an attitude of care, love, and concern.



*“Anyone who reaches out for help is entitled to our compassion, our attention, and our unconditional acceptance. Any addict, regardless of clean time, should be able to pour out his or her pain in an atmosphere free of judgment.”*

IT WORKS: HOW AND WHY

Regardless of how vigilant we are with our mental and spiritual program of recovery, we may react to medication like we did when using drugs. The power of the disease of addiction cannot be underestimated. The Basic Text warns us that our disease is cunning, and tells us that honesty is the solution. When we are in pain, we are highly susceptible to self-deception, fear, denial, and anger. It doesn't matter what the medication is, or whether it was our drug of choice. Our thinking and actions may be affected by any mind- and mood-altering medications. During these times, we benefit greatly from maintaining a support network. These NA friends will help us truthfully inventory ourselves and monitor our use of any medication. We need to remain open-minded when our sponsor

and other trusted NA friends offer suggestions based on their experience. Communicating honestly with our sponsor, medical care providers, and loved ones is vital to our recovery. We strive for the willingness to avoid our self-will and follow the suggestions of others who have our best interests at heart.

**Communicating honestly with our sponsor, medical care providers, and loved ones is vital to our recovery.**

An unfortunate reality in our fellowship is that some members abuse their prescribed medication and relapse. Any mind- and mood-altering medication can be dangerous for addicts. Members who relapse on prescribed medication may be reluctant to return to meetings for fear of being judged. Knowing that their lives are at stake, we treat these addicts with compassion. Encouraging these members to share honestly and admit when they have abused their medication can remind other addicts to be vigilant in protecting their own recovery. Our experience shows that many NA members have been successful in taking medication as prescribed and maintaining their recovery. When facing a situation where we may be prescribed medication, we should seek out the experience of these members. Some common elements that these members share are regular meeting attendance, close contact with their sponsor and NA support network, and willingness

to follow suggestions from those who have faced similar situations successfully.

When we are confronted with a medical condition where we may have to take medication, our initial fear may be of taking too much, but we also may go to the other extreme. The urge to allow ourselves to suffer unnecessarily rather than take medication may be great. We resist this urge to stubbornly insist that we know better than the doctor, refuse all medications, or neglect problems that require medical attention. When a professional tells us that pain is not conducive to healing, we should listen. Likewise, ignoring health problems because of fear or pride may, in fact, make matters worse for us. Once again, we remind ourselves of the importance of making a conscious decision not to medicate ourselves or treat our own illnesses.

*“When I was about a year and a half clean, I suffered my first bout of a recurrent illness. My sponsor told me not to be a martyr and to go to my doctor, who knows that I am a recovering addict. I didn’t listen, and as a result I was hospitalized for five days, in traction and on strong medication. If I had followed my sponsor’s suggestion, I would have been on a milder medication for a much shorter period of time.”*

Our experience has shown that no drugs are risk-free for us. Any medication may unleash the craving and the compulsion that haunted us while we were using. Nonprescription drugs can be as dangerous as those prescribed by a physician. Even if we have not seen the doctor, we can practice vigilance and responsibility for our recovery by checking

our motives and seeking the suggestions of our sponsor before we take anything. It is important that we consider their use as carefully as the use of any other medication. Any drug, prescription or nonprescription, has the potential to be abused.

Sometimes, our members have found, alternative methods of treatment can be used. This is another way in which we can exercise responsibility for our recovery, even during illness. Many of these methods require little or no medication or the use of medication that doesn't alter our moods or our thinking. Some NA members even share that they have felt spiritually strengthened by exploring and utilizing these alternatives. We seek solutions in our recovery when we are faced with an illness or injury by asking questions and doing research. Asking members what worked for them can be a powerful way to utilize the support of the fellowship. Reaching out for experience and new ideas strengthens our recovery and gives us a renewed appreciation for the NA program.

*“Today, I live with chronic pain. It is not always debilitating, but pain is almost always present. I do my best to respect my physical limitations. I refrain from activities that result in pain, and have found new activities that are relatively pain-free. I practice surrendering to my physical limitations so I do not aggravate my condition and create more pain. Fortunately, I have found alternatives that usually provide me the relief that I need to get through my day. All of these have had some positive effect. Alternative methods reduce my pain so that I don't need to try to manage with mood-altering medication.”*



By living the Narcotics Anonymous program, we find a measure of stability in our lives. We apply the principles of the program to help us find spiritual well-being when we are ill. Sharing openly with our doctor and our sponsor, relying on a Higher Power, and practicing the Twelve Steps are important tools. These can help each member find a sense of balance that is comfortable and appropriate. Life in recovery can be complicated by illness and the possibility that we may need to take prescribed medication. We strive to stay vigilant in applying the principles we have learned in NA. When we do this, our personal goals and recovery remain intact.

- ⊗ Regardless of how we work our mental and spiritual program of recovery, we may react to medication like we did when using drugs.
- ⊗ It's helpful to remember the importance of making a conscious decision not to medicate ourselves or treat our own illnesses.
- ⊗ A recovery support network is vital. Our sponsor, medical care providers, and NA friends can help us inventory ourselves and monitor our use of any medication.
- ⊗ Cleantime is an issue for each of us to resolve individually with our sponsor and our Higher Power.

*“Everything that occurs in the course of NA service must be motivated by the desire to more successfully carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers.”*

BASIC TEXT

The primary purpose of our groups is to carry the message of recovery. While being of service to our fellowship, there may be times when we begin to feel that taking mind-changing and mood-altering medication has affected our ability to serve effectively. In some cases, members may share with us that they think our behavior and attitude have been impaired by our illness and treatment. They may tell us we are not the same person. Even though our temptation may be to rebel against the opinions of our fellow trusted servants, we remember that they are our eyes and ears. We strive to maintain an attitude of humility and open-mindedness. We bring their concerns to our sponsor and supportive NA friends, and seek a solution.




Effective leadership is highly valued in NA, and being of service is a principled action. We may want to inventory our decisions and motives with service. We talk to our sponsor and NA friends; they can help us avoid self-deception. Being honest with ourselves about our strengths and weaknesses is an important part of any inventory. Some members have found that they were fully capable of fulfilling their service commitments while taking medication to treat an illness or injury, while others have made the choice to step down. This is a deeply personal decision. We will want to consider what is best for both the fellowship and ourselves.

If we decide to resign from a trusted servant position due to the effects of medication, this can be considered an action based in integrity, courage, and humility. Informing fellow members that we need to step down for a period of time for health reasons illustrates recovery principles in action. This can be viewed as the fulfillment of a personal commitment to our health, rather than a failure. We can remind ourselves that we live this way of life just for today, and the decisions we make are not forever.

We come to accept today's health issues, and we can seek other ways to be of service. We may consider a group-level commitment, or we may be a committee member rather than committee chair. We remain open-minded, willing, and honest, seeking out the experience of other members to learn how they were able to serve while living with health issues and medication. Being of service to a fellowship that saved our lives is an act of love, and is not conditional on a specific position or title.

## Mental Health Issues



*“We recommend turning our legal problems over to lawyers and our financial or medical problems to professionals. Part of learning how to live successfully is learning when we need help.”*

BASIC TEXT

One of the beautiful things about NA is that addicts from all walks of life can find recovery in our program. Our meetings welcome anyone who

has the desire to experience the NA program of recovery. Some members recover in NA with mental illness that requires medication. Just as we wouldn't suggest that an insulin-dependent diabetic addict stop taking their insulin, we don't tell mentally ill addicts to stop taking their prescribed medication. We leave medical issues up to doctors. As NA members, our primary purpose is to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers, not to give medical advice. Responsibility rests with the member to be honest about their condition with informed healthcare professionals, and to evaluate their treatment and medication options.

*“Over the years I have learned that in order to remain clean, I have to be proactive in dealing with my mental illness; and in order to remain mentally stable, I have to be proactive in my recovery. For me, the disease of addiction and my mental disorder must be dealt with simultaneously. Although the steps are my best defense against relapse, no amount of step work, prayer, meeting attendance, or calling my sponsor will change the fact that I have mental illness. Just because I'm clean does not mean that I no longer have mental health issues. The very disorder that affected me when I was using still affects me today. Ultimately, the decision to take medication or not to take medication is a deeply personal one.”*

An aspect of addiction is the compulsive misuse and abuse of drugs, often at the expense of our physical and mental health. In recovery, we learn to be responsible for ourselves. For some addicts, this may mean seeking mental health treatment and taking medication as prescribed. Our experience shows

**We should share honestly  
with our doctor and sponsor,  
examine our motives,  
and decide what course  
of action is right for us.**

that there are times when our members have been prescribed mental health medication for symptoms resulting from our active addiction. Members in this situation often find that after a period of time in recovery they are able to stop taking this medication under the supervision of their doctor. This is not the case for everyone. Our membership also includes addicts who have lifelong mental health issues. We should share honestly with our doctor and sponsor, examine our motives, and decide what course of action is right for us. In NA we have freedom to make decisions about our life and recovery in a safe environment, free of judgment. It is our personal responsibility to seek professional help when we need it. A mental health professional can assist us in understanding our illness and explain our treatment options.

*“All addicted persons are welcome and equal in obtaining the relief that they are seeking from their addiction; every addict can recover in this program on an equal basis.”*

BASIC TEXT

NA promises us freedom from active addiction, but that is our only promise. We have found collectively that medicine, religion, and psychiatry alone are not sufficient to treat the disease of addiction. This may mean that medicine and psychiatry are sometimes necessary to treat mental illness in combination with our program of recovery in NA. Some addicts have found that professional help for a short period of time has allowed them to deal with a crisis outside the scope of their recovery in NA. Often these members emerge with a new perspective on life. Others may face situations where long-term medication and therapy are warranted. We are free to seek outside professional help and continue in our program of recovery in NA.



The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting. As a member of the group, we try to be mindful of the message we carry. We have found that a meeting may not

be the ideal place to share personal details about our diagnosis and treatment. Our experience shows us that sharing these details one-on-one with a trusted NA friend or sponsor, instead of in a meeting, can help to maintain an atmosphere of recovery. There is no shame in getting the help we need. NA meetings can provide a safe place for us to share our feelings in the company of other recovering addicts. Sharing recovery in NA, we open ourselves up to experience the collective compassion of the group. Our NA friends will help us keep our lives in perspective,

and remind us how to apply the spiritual principles of this program to all areas of our lives. With the freedom to share honestly in meetings comes the responsibility to seek a solution. In NA, our identification as addicts is what we have in common. This allows us to focus on our similarities instead of our differences. It is possible to find freedom from active addiction in NA and to be taking medication prescribed by an informed healthcare professional for a mental illness.

- ⊙ With the use of any medication, we must be honest with ourselves, our healthcare team, and our sponsor about our feelings and motives.
- ⊙ In NA the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. As members we have no reason to judge one another.

Meetings are a powerful way of carrying our message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. New members come to NA with a variety of life problems, and are sometimes disruptive in meetings before they learn what is appropriate in that atmosphere. Our first reaction may be apprehension, but it is important that we welcome every addict seeking recovery. We remember the care and concern that helped us find a sense of belonging in NA. Our collective attitude should be one of loving acceptance toward all addicts, regardless of any other problems they may experience. Whether we are the newcomer or have years clean in NA, anonymity means that we all have an equal opportunity to recover.

# Emergency Care

*“The steps are our solution. They are our survival kit. They are our defense against addiction which is a deadly disease. Our steps are the principles that make our recovery possible.”*

BASIC TEXT

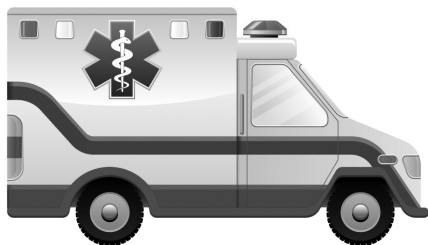
Recovery does not exempt us from accidents and injuries. Sometimes, emergency room treatment becomes necessary. When this happens, we are often asked to make quick decisions. The foundation we have in recovery can be a crucial factor in our decision-making process. It is important to be honest with our medical providers. If we are able to communicate, we let the professionals treating us know that we are recovering addicts. This may influence the choices they make about our medication. We accept that we are not in control of the situation and trust the professionals who are treating us. It is helpful to remember that the principles of recovery apply to every area of our life, even in a crisis.

*“Even though I thought I was alone, I wasn’t—because I prayed. I then called my sponsor, who met me at the emergency room. Once there, I was examined and offered medication. I explained my addiction to the doctor and asked if not taking the medication would be life-threatening. With my sponsor’s support, I was able to make an informed decision.”*



We may find that an acute event is not life-threatening. When we break a bone, experience a high fever, or cut ourselves, we may require emergency care. We are usually given an opportunity to reach out to our sponsor and NA friends before seeking any medical treatment. Relying on others can help alleviate the fear and irrational thinking that we may experience during a medical emergency. We can discuss the treatment options presented to us and receive the love and guidance from our NA support network. However, in some circumstances, we may be involved in an accident or traumatic injury and be forced to act very quickly. In these situations, we may not have immediate access to any of our NA friends or sponsor. During these times we rely on our Higher Power for guidance and maintain our faith. In NA, we are never alone.

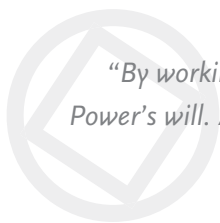
When we are faced with a medical emergency, we can tap into the spiritual connection we have developed with a Higher Power through the steps. The Basic Text tells us that the power that brought us to the program is still with us and will continue to guide us if we allow it. The presence of people we trust and faith in a Higher Power are both valuable tools. The strength we gain from this support can help us



make decisions that will enhance our recovery. Even in an emergency, we can still apply our program of recovery.

- ⊗ The foundation we have in recovery can be an asset during an acute event.
- ⊗ Relying on others alleviates the fear and irrational thinking that come with isolation.
- ⊗ The spiritual connection we have developed with a Higher Power helps guide our decisions and provides a source of strength.

## Chronic Illness



*“By working the steps, we come to accept a Higher Power’s will. Acceptance leads to recovery. We lose our fear of the unknown. We are set free.”*

BASIC TEXT

Chronic illness is a reality for many NA members. A chronic illness is a persistent, often life-threatening, and incurable condition. Our experience is that chronic illnesses may have periods of remission and recurrence. We can come into recovery with knowledge of an illness, or we may discover after we get to NA that we have a chronic medical condition. Regardless of our particular circumstances, we apply the spiritual principles of our program to living with our chronic illness. Our goal is to accept our illness and live life in recovery. We embrace surrender, humility, faith, and willingness. Our attitude will either hurt or help us; we remind ourselves that

**Through ongoing surrender,  
we can find freedom and the ability  
to accept our illness.**

we have no control over life's challenges. In fact, our survival and recovery depend on our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

There are many chronic illnesses that our members live with that have treatments available. Our experience shows that sometimes the treatments can present their own set of challenges. NA doesn't advise members on medical care, but we can help each other with the emotions we experience as a result of our illness and treatment. Some days we may feel hopeless, helpless, and angry. Other days will seem less painful and more positive as we learn to continually surrender. Through ongoing surrender, we can find freedom and the ability to accept our illness. We give ourselves permission to feel exactly as we do, and to look for ways to cope, not escape. We can see our illness as a curse, or we can choose to view it as a gift that can bring us closer to our Higher Power and loved ones. We make a conscious decision to walk through our lives in a manner that will strengthen our commitment to our health and recovery.

*"Separation from the atmosphere of recovery and from the spirit of service to others slows our spiritual growth."*

BASIC TEXT

A renewal of our commitment to maintain recovery in Narcotics Anonymous is crucial when we live with a chronic illness. By renewing our commitment to turn our will and our lives over to our Higher Power's care, we open a channel that allows this Power to work in our lives. Reaching out to others who are willing to listen to us share about our chronic illness will help us to realize that we are not alone. Accepting support from others can help us to avoid self-centeredness and self-obsession. We work to get outside ourselves and maintain a connection to others in recovery. When we listen with an open mind to what other addicts face in their lives, we may feel less like a victim and actually find some gratitude for our own problems. It is vital to our recovery that we share honestly about our feelings in meetings. Newcomers as well as our NA friends benefit from listening to us share about life issues and spiritual solutions.

Our illness provides us an opportunity to be an example of recovery principles in action. Understandably, some of our fellow addicts may be frightened of chronic illness. When we encounter fear or misunderstanding from other members, we may choose to share about our illness with them and acknowledge their feelings of fear. Letting them know that we understand their discomfort may help put them at ease around us. We do our best to accept their feelings and welcome any support they are able to offer. It may help us to remember that there are other members whom we can count on for warmth and emotional availability. These fellow addicts offer unconditional love, care, and support.


*“My gratitude for a few addicts and my sponsor leaves me without words to convey my appreciation. They didn’t allow me to isolate or wallow in self-pity. Calling and stopping by daily, taking me to meetings, fixing up their cars with pillows and blankets so I could ride comfortably are a few acts of their kindness.”*

One addict helping another is an active demonstration of empathy. By allowing ourselves to experience the therapeutic value of sharing our recovery with other addicts, we are able to concentrate on living. We do not allow the illness itself to become our focal point. There may be times when we are unable to attend meetings regularly or continue with our service and sponsorship commitments. It is important to let our NA friends know that we will not be attending meetings for a period of time and that we are resigning from our service commitments. We experience humility on a deep level when we admit to ourselves and those around us that our illness and treatment have impaired our ability to serve. When we make a decision to step down from our service commitments, we are demonstrating recovery principles. Being honest with our sponsor and sponsees by asking for their support can strengthen those relationships. Keeping in contact with our NA friends when we are unable to be physically present for a period of time is vital. We may ask that they bring a meeting to us. During the time when we are convalescing, we may find that the phone is how we stay connected to NA. We strive to get outside of ourselves and maintain regular communication with our NA support system.

After a period of illness or treatment, it is important that we return to meetings as soon as we are able. The addicts who have supported us will be happy to see us, and the newcomer can benefit from hearing us share about walking through adversity and staying clean. Upon our return to meetings and service commitments, we may find that the landscape of our recovery has changed. Relationships change naturally over time, and our illness may make these changes more pronounced. Some friendships might fade; others will be stronger. Perhaps we will find that those whom we have supported in the past are now there to help us. We accept these changes as a part of the natural ebb and flow of life. We are grateful that NA is always there for us.

- ⊕ By applying spiritual principles to living with a chronic illness, we focus on living. We don't allow our chronic illness to become the focal point of our lives.
- ⊕ We maintain our commitment to recovery in Narcotics Anonymous by maintaining vigilant contact with our Higher Power, our sponsor, and our NA friends.
- ⊕ One addict helping another is an active demonstration of empathy. When we participate in our recovery by sharing honestly and listening with an open mind in meetings, we can avoid feeling like a victim and find gratitude for our lives.

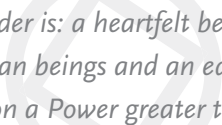
# Chronic Pain



*“The Program of Narcotics Anonymous provides an opportunity for us to ease the pain of living through spiritual principles.”*

BASIC TEXT

Chronic physical pain is a medical condition that many of us live with in our recovery. The pain may be a result of illness or injury, but the source is not as important as the solutions we find. We remember that the spiritual principles that improve our quality of life in good health are the same as those we can use when living with chronic pain. We surrender to the pain, accept our illness, and reach out for help. We have learned that an addict alone is in bad company. Isolation gives our disease a chance to flourish. We can counteract the self-deception of our addiction by sharing honestly about our feelings in meetings, as well as with our sponsor and trusted NA friends. This open communication allows us to experience one of the most powerful tools that this program offers: the therapeutic value of one addict helping another.



*“This is what surrender is: a heartfelt belief in our own fallibility as human beings and an equally heartfelt decision to rely on a Power greater than our own.”*

IT WORKS: HOW AND WHY

We maintain our recovery by consistently practicing a spiritual program in all areas of our life. When we are receiving medical treatment for chronic pain, it is important for us to apply spiritual principles.

**We commit to work closely  
with our sponsor and medical  
professionals and to draw  
strength from our Higher Power.**

Sharing honestly with our medical care providers the fact that we are addicts in recovery is helpful. We ask that this be taken into consideration when medications are prescribed. Being honest with our NA friends about our pain and fears is equally important. We strive to remain open-minded and ask our doctors about alternative treatments for pain. Seeking out the experience of other addicts in recovery who have faced similar situations is often beneficial. These members have the opportunity to share with us what worked for them with chronic pain while maintaining their recovery. Being open-minded to experience from those we trust and respect will help us in our decision making. We remain willing to explore all treatment options available to us. We commit to work closely with our sponsor and medical professionals and to draw strength from our Higher Power.

*“With a few years clean I was diagnosed with a disease that required a few surgeries and resulted in chronic pain. I have learned many things from this process, but none more important than the lesson that it is far easier to find ways to manage my pain than it is for me to manage medication.”*



Living with chronic pain gives us an opportunity to experience a new level of responsibility for our personal recovery. We may need to question our pain and our motives using an inventory in the same way we inventoried our character during our Fourth Step. Our sponsor can help with this. We ask ourselves questions about the pain we are feeling and answer them as honestly as we can in order to assess whether we need medication. Addicts are especially vulnerable to our old ways of thinking when we are in pain. Sharing honestly with our sponsor or trusted NA friends will help us keep our pain in perspective. In this situation, we are often surprised to discover how much discomfort we can tolerate without medication. If we take prescribed pain medication, we should remember that our bodies and minds may react. Our experience shows that we may need to ask for extra help when the time comes to stop taking pain medication, in case we experience withdrawal symptoms. With courage, we reach out and accept the love and support of our sponsor and NA friends.

*“We do not diagnose anyone’s condition or track the progress of our patients—in fact we have no patients, only members. Our groups do not provide professional therapeutic, medical, legal, or psychiatric services. We are simply a fellowship of recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean.”*

IT WORKS: HOW AND WHY

The disease of addiction is progressive, incurable, and fatal. We are vulnerable to our disease even after long periods of abstinence. With this in mind, many members have found it helpful to ask for assistance from their NA friends and sponsor in monitoring any prescribed mind-changing and mood-altering medication. Living with chronic pain wears us down physically and mentally. We may find ourselves feeling powerless, hopeless, and weak. Our experience shows that denial, justification, self-deception, and rationalization will be present when we face illnesses or injuries that require pain medication. We will want to work closely with medical professionals and our sponsor during the treatment of pain. Sometimes, with sustained chronic pain in recovery, healthcare providers will prescribe certain medications for pain that are also used as drug replacement medications. It is important to remind ourselves that we are taking this medication as prescribed for physical pain. In this medical situation, these medications are not being taken to treat addiction.



Once again, we find that information about our diagnosis and treatment is very personal. Sharing these details one-on-one with a trusted NA friend or sponsor, instead of in a meeting, can help us remain accountable while still maintaining an atmosphere of recovery.

We remember that the primary purpose of our groups is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. There may be times during our experience with chronic pain when we are the addict suffering. During such times, we may find it beneficial to listen to the experience of others, allowing them to carry the message of recovery to us.

*“Today, I have to get honest with myself and turn to my Higher Power for help. Each time pain medication is prescribed for me, I explore my motives for taking it. Am I taking medication to get high? Am I imagining or magnifying this pain? Is this medication necessary right now? If it is necessary, a network of safeguards can be set up among my sponsor, recovering friends, family, and medical personnel.”*

Our experience shows that many NA members have been successful in taking medication as prescribed for chronic pain and keeping their recovery intact. Some of the actions that these members have in common are regular meeting attendance, close contact with their sponsor and NA support network, and having another addict who knows all the details of their medical treatment. Unfortunately, many of us also have experience with a member who abused their pain medication and relapsed. The reality is that treatment of chronic pain with medication can be very dangerous for addicts. Members who relapse from pain medication may harbor feelings of shame, guilt, and remorse. We can offer these addicts compassion and understanding. Providing meetings with a caring, loving, and nonjudgmental atmosphere where members can honestly admit

when they have abused their medication is vital to their recovery. In doing this, we are carrying the message of hope to the addict who still suffers.

- ⊕ We can inventory our pain and our motives with our sponsor; this offers us an opportunity to be personally responsible and helps us to maintain our recovery while living with chronic pain.
- ⊕ We should be aware that we may experience withdrawal symptoms when we stop taking prescribed pain medication; we reach out and accept the support of our NA friends and sponsor.
- ⊕ We can remember that there is no safe use of drugs for an addict. Setting up a network of safeguards to protect us from ourselves may be helpful.

## Terminal Illness

*“We grasp the limitless strength provided for us through our daily prayer and surrender, as long as we keep faith and renew it.”*

BASIC TEXT

Members of our fellowship may face a terminal illness diagnosis at some point in their recovery. Most likely, those who receive this information will have feelings of fear, despair, and anger. We try not to let our feelings of doubt and hopelessness eclipse our hard-earned faith in a Higher Power. Our literature says that when we lose focus on the here and now,

our problems become magnified unreasonably. With this in mind, we strive to live just for today. We learn in recovery that when we share about our pain, we gain some relief. We reach out to our sponsor and NA friends who love and support us unconditionally. We find meetings that offer a safe place for us to share our feelings. When we share with others, we break through the isolation of our disease. We gather courage from the love and empathy of those who care for us. Our experience shows that we can maintain our recovery while living with a terminal disease.

*“When I first heard my diagnosis, I ran through a range of emotions. ‘It’s not fair; I already have the disease of addiction. How much should one person have to deal with?’ During this time I became angry with my Higher Power, fearing I had gotten clean only to die. At the same time I felt guilty—like I had no right to feel all those things. I felt as if I ... should have been grateful that it wasn’t worse.”*

Our program of recovery depends on daily maintenance. Even with a vigilant recovery program, powerlessness can be a stumbling block for us. We remind ourselves how recovery has taught us to live just for today and leave the results up to our Higher Power. When we face situations beyond our control, we are especially vulnerable to the disease of addiction. Our self-destructive defects may surface and we will want to apply spiritual principles. The Basic Text reminds us that self-pity is one of the most destructive defects, robbing us of all positive energy. We strive to live just for today. The people we surround ourselves with can encourage our

surrender and help us break through pain and resentment. We may choose to distance ourselves from those who pity us and thrive on the crisis, rather than the solution. Instead, we seek out the company of other recovering addicts who bring out the best in us, encourage us to move forward, and enhance our spiritual program and our life.

We remind ourselves that we are living with a terminal illness. Facing the reality of our lives when we are hurting is a service we do for ourselves. We can accept the love of our support network in the here and now, without fear of tomorrow. Our experience shows that continuing our participation in daily recovery through meetings and phone conversations helps us feel connected. We remember the important principle we learn in NA of living just for today. By placing the emphasis on life, we can appreciate the day, not rob ourselves of the precious present, and remain free from worry about what the future may hold.

*“At twenty-two years clean, I was diagnosed with terminal illness. Amazingly, through working the program of NA, I instinctively knew what to do—call my sponsor, call my best friends, and talk to other addicts about having to take medications. I received so much help and reassurance from other addicts that I knew my recovery was first.”*

Our commitment to our program of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous offers serenity during difficult times. We gain courage from the application of the spiritual principles of the program. We come to understand the powerlessness and surrender of our

First Step on a whole new level. The need for faith and sanity that we discovered in Step Two is valuable to us now. By renewing our commitment to turn our will and our lives over to our Higher Power's care, we open a channel that allows this Power to work in our lives. Prayer and meditation are powerful tools that can offer comfort and guidance. The steps are vital in leading us toward acceptance. Through this process, we prepare ourselves to handle the reality of our illness with all the spiritual strength and hope our recovery can provide. We gradually learn to allow for the changes in our body, mind, and spirit.

*"We know that whatever the day brings, God has given us everything we need for our spiritual well-being. It is all right for us to admit powerlessness, because God is powerful enough to help us stay clean and enjoy spiritual progress. God is helping us to get our house in order."*

BASIC TEXT

We have many things to consider when we face a terminal illness. Our healthcare providers, our sponsor, and our NA friends can help us. Often with a terminal illness, members need mind- and mood-altering medication. We avoid the tendency to judge ourselves harshly, and we seek out the support of addicts who accept us and love us for exactly who we are. We may not realize how destructive judgment can be until we experience it for ourselves. We don't allow ourselves to be isolated by feelings of fear and inadequacy. Judgment is not therapeutic, but empathy is. We remain engaged in the process of our recovery by going to meetings, working our

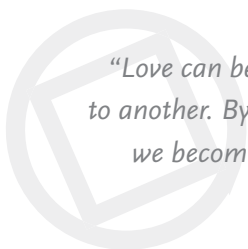
steps, and reaching out. When we honestly accept and try to be ourselves, we are able to gain freedom from fear and self-pity. We remind ourselves that we are perfectly imperfect human beings, doing our best to live with terminal illness.

In quiet moments of meditation, we may also find courage and answers we are seeking within ourselves. We can use this time to make decisions and plan for times when we may be unable to make our wishes known. Some members may choose to visit their regular meetings to say good-bye to the group. Others will find it comforting to invite their core group of NA friends to bring a meeting to their home or hospital room. The company of other addicts who know us well is a source of comfort and strength. We have found that a strong foundation in recovery prepares us to face all phases of our life with a measure of dignity and grace.

- ⊕ We are living with a terminal illness in recovery. We accept the love of our NA friends in the here and now, without fear of tomorrow.
- ⊕ Prayer and meditation are powerful tools. We prepare ourselves to handle the reality of our illness with all the spiritual strength and hope our recovery can provide.
- ⊕ We avoid the tendency to judge ourselves harshly and don't allow ourselves to be isolated by feelings of fear and inadequacy. Judgment is not therapeutic, but empathy is.



# Supporting Members with Illness



*“Love can be the flow of life energy from one person to another. By caring, sharing, and praying for others, we become a part of them. Through empathy, we allow addicts to become a part of us.”*

BASIC TEXT

In recovery, we develop intimate and meaningful relationships. When we are close to someone with an illness, whether they are a friend, a partner, or a sponsor, we may find ourselves facing intense feelings. We may feel anger, helplessness, fear, guilt, and sadness. All of these are to be expected when someone we care about is ill. The first reaction to news of an illness or trauma may be to get caught up in our self-centeredness and other character defects. We remember that we have the ability to put spiritual principles into action today. We make the choice to be a positive force in the lives of the people around us. The process of working the steps has given us the ability to love and accept who we are, and become able to truly love others. Taking care of ourselves and being committed to our own recovery allows us to be an ongoing source of strength for those close to us. We remember that our loved ones need our support, not our pity. We strive to set aside the self-obsession of our disease and offer care and concern to our loved ones during difficult times.

*“In the last months I felt that I was never doing enough, that I wasn’t repaying my friend for what he had given me. The guilt was tormenting me. I believed that I wasn’t a good friend at all. But I shared about it with friends and at meetings, and by being open to the message of recovery I realized that I was doing the best I could and that my effort was good enough.”*

Being a source of strength and support for a fellow addict is an honor. We can express love in a number of ways. An NA friend, sponsor, or sponsee may ask us to accompany them to the doctor, or ask for our help in being accountable while they are taking medication. This is not an invitation to interfere with the medical treatment or personal wishes of our loved ones. We greet these requests for support humbly and gratefully, knowing that it takes courage to reach out for help. Making the effort to pick someone up for a meeting or visiting them while they are convalescing are acts of kindness that our fellow members will appreciate. They may ask us to prepare meals, or assist them in other daily activities that they are unable to accomplish on their own. They may also ask for our help in more serious matters like seeking advice from legal or financial

**The process of working the steps has given us the ability to love and accept who we are, and become able to truly love others.**

professionals. We take care to focus on carrying the message, not carrying the addict. We remember that there are many times when something as simple as a phone call can make a big difference to an addict who feels isolated by illness. We gratefully accept these opportunities to be of service to our fellow members.

*“A man I sponsor, with almost ten years cleantime in NA, telephoned me with some bad news. Doctors said he had an incurable disease that would kill him within sixty days. He lived for two years, however, and continued to work a program of recovery. His courage inspired all of us, and he will be missed. His example in living the NA principles will always be remembered.”*

Like birth, death is a natural part of the life cycle. When we face the loss of a loved one in recovery, we strive to remember this simple fact. Applying the spiritual principles we learn in the steps helps us face reality. Even with time in the program, our first tendency may be to run from painful situations. Facing our fear and reaching out in spite of it demonstrates our faith in action. Our friends need our unconditional love and support now more than ever. We do what we can to assist them in facing the end of their lives with dignity and grace. When we encourage them to reach out and share with us honestly, we may find that there are details about their medical care that they would prefer remain confidential. We honor their requests, and in doing so we honor them. We counter our own self-centeredness by focusing on life, and on the miracle of recovery that brought us all together.

When people we love in NA are facing an illness or injury, the outpouring of love they experience from the fellowship can be overwhelming. This is a testament to the kind of bonds we form in recovery. However, it is important to remember that some addicts' families may not understand our close relationships to their loved ones. They may feel that their privacy is being invaded if groups of unfamiliar people descend on their home or their loved one's hospital room. We remember to extend them the same respect and empathy we give to each other. Our experience has shown that the atmosphere of recovery we cherish in our meetings can translate to these situations as well. Anonymity is also important to remember. In some cases, there may be family members or other associates who are unaware of their loved one's recovery in NA. We can be examples of the spiritual principles of anonymity, integrity, and prudence no matter where we are. In doing this, we display gratitude for our loved one, our life, and our recovery.

- ⊙ We remember that our loved ones need our support, not our pity.
- ⊙ We can express love in a number of ways when our loved ones are facing an illness. We can call our friend on the phone, pick them up for a meeting, visit them, prepare meals, or assist them in other daily activities that they are unable to accomplish on their own.
- ⊙ Dying is a natural part of life. When we apply the spiritual principles we learn in the steps, we are able to face reality and be there to support those we love.

# Conclusion

Coming to accept an illness is a process, like recovery. In the beginning we may experience many familiar feelings like denial, anger, rationalization, self-deception, and grief. It may be helpful to remind ourselves that these feelings are a reaction to a painful situation. When we apply the spiritual principles we have learned in NA, we can reach a place where surrender and acceptance replace the anger and denial. Reaching out can help us break through isolation and self-pity. Acceptance of something doesn't necessarily mean that we like it; we can dislike something and still accept it.

We have a choice today. Like anything else in our recovery, we can make a decision to view our experience with illness or injury not as a crisis, but as an opportunity for spiritual growth. With the help of NA, we strive to surrender to our medical situation and accept the reality of the treatment. We ask for the guidance of our sponsor and our Higher Power when making decisions. We can decide to employ spiritual principles like humility and faith when we

**We have found that, by following the suggestions offered by the NA program, we can successfully live with an illness or injury while maintaining our recovery.**

reach out for help to our friends in the fellowship. Experience has shown us that maintaining our recovery during times of illness or injury can be done by striving to consistently practice a spiritual program. We become a living resource for addicts who will face similar situations in the future.

We have found that, by following the suggestions offered by the NA program, we can successfully live with an illness or injury while maintaining our recovery. Building a strong foundation in recovery prepares us to accept life on life's terms. Working the steps is a process that teaches us solutions that we can apply to the realities of life and death. We develop the ability to survive our emotions by applying spiritual principles each day. Reaching out for help is an integral piece of our program, and especially important when walking through difficult times. Recovery meetings can provide the support of others who know us well. Our experience may become a valuable tool for another addict who faces a similar situation, and sharing our experience with others strengthens our recovery. The principles of NA help us face anything just for today.

# Suggestions to Follow with Illness and Injury

**Some of our members have found the following list of practical tips and suggestions helpful.**

- ⊗ Go to as many NA meetings as possible and read NA literature.
- ⊗ Communicate honestly with your sponsor to avoid self-will and get suggestions from someone who has your best interests at heart.
- ⊗ Reach out to other NA members. Ask for support.
- ⊗ Practice the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.
- ⊗ Prayer, meditation, and sharing can help us get outside ourselves to focus on something beyond our own discomfort.
- ⊗ Share your thoughts and feelings honestly and openly with your sponsor and NA friends. They can help us find acceptance.
- ⊗ Identifying yourself as a recovering addict to healthcare professionals may be helpful.
- ⊗ Talk to your healthcare provider and sponsor before taking prescription or nonprescription medication.
- ⊗ Arrange for an NA member's support when facing surgery or other medical treatment involving medication.
- ⊗ Inventory your medical condition and explore alternatives to medication. Write about your feelings and motives.
- ⊗ When supporting a member living with illness, remember that they need our unconditional love, not our pity or judgment.
- ⊗ Continue on your path of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous by applying spiritual principles.

# Additional NA Material You May Wish to Read

**Recovery and Relapse (IP #6)** Excerpted from the White Booklet, this pamphlet discusses the early warning signs of relapse, as well as actions that addicts can take to avoid a relapse.

**Just for Today (IP #8)** Five positive thoughts to help recovering addicts are presented in this pamphlet. Ideal for reading on a daily basis, these thoughts provide addicts with the perspective of clean living to face each new day. The remainder of the pamphlet develops the principle of living just for today, encouraging addicts to trust in a Higher Power and work the NA program on a daily basis.

**Sponsorship (IP #11)** Sponsorship is a vital tool for recovery. This introductory pamphlet helps provide an understanding of sponsorship, especially for new members. The pamphlet addresses some questions, including “What Is a Sponsor?” and “How Do You Get a Sponsor?”

**Sponsorship** A book containing many NA members’ first-hand experience with sponsorship. This book includes a section in Chapter Four that highlights how a sponsor can be a valuable source of guidance and support when facing an illness in recovery.

**Self-Acceptance (IP #19)** The first half of this pamphlet, “The Problem,” discusses aspects of an unmanageable life, including not accepting ourselves or others. The second half of the pamphlet, “The Twelve Steps Are the Solution,” outlines the process that allows recovering addicts to apply the Twelve Steps in every area of their lives in order to gain acceptance of themselves and others.

**More Will Be Revealed (Basic Text, Chapter 10)** This chapter contains a variety of recovery related topics. Among them is a discussion of the use of medication in recovery.

**NA Groups and Medication** This service pamphlet (SP) is a resource intended to help groups maintain unity as they navigate issues which may arise with members who are taking prescription medication.