

The Art of Substitution

Medical Patient Education Module

How to Replace Addiction with a New Passion

On the road to recovery from your addiction, you face an uncertain future. As an addict, your life revolved around one thing. You were consumed by your need to get the next high. Now, without that drive, you may be wondering what to do with yourself. How will you spend your time? How will you resist the urge to use again? There is one answer to both of these questions: replace your addiction with another passion, a better and more healthful one. Your drug was your old passion. It's time to move on from it and find a new outlet for your time, energy and creativity.

Remembering Your Passion

As you begin to rebuild your life after addiction, you may be struggling to find purpose, meaning and a clear path. Maybe you have practical needs to attend to, like taking care of your kids, rebuilding a relationship with your spouse or getting back to work. These may be important, but they won't be enough to replace your craving for your drug of choice.

To begin to explore your passions, think back to a time before you used and abused drugs or alcohol. What did you enjoy doing the most? Maybe you liked to dance, or run or paint. Revisit your old passions. Take time to reflect on your past and choose one or two activities that you used to enjoy. Get back in to them and see if you can rekindle the joy they once brought you.

Finding New Passions

Maybe it's too painful to go back to the past and to a happier time before your addiction. Maybe your previous hobbies or passions just don't grab you the way they used to. Don't feel bad about that, just move on to something new. Since you are beginning a new chapter in your life and are getting a fresh start, why not include new activities?

Just trying something new, in itself, can be a joy. Get out there and try things you wouldn't have thought of doing before. If they don't stick, it's not a problem. Just try again until you find your passion and your reason for getting up each day. If you have always enjoyed helping others, consider volunteer work. If you have a creative streak, try different types of art classes. If you're feeling like your fresh start needs a fresh body, get into some exercise programs.

It may seem a little scary initially, but trying new things to find your passion will be well worth the effort. Recovering addicts need something to get excited about, something to be passionate about, and something to distract from any cravings or urges to relapse. If you are feeling insecure about getting out there, enlist a trusted friend or family member to try a new activity with you. You can find new passions and rekindle damaged relationships at the same time.

Avoiding Addiction Swapping

There is one danger to watch out for as you embark on the journey to find your passion: addiction swapping. As a recovering addict, you have the tendency to be impulsive and to become obsessive about things. It's how you got into trouble in the first place. It is all too easy to simply transfer your addictive urges onto something new rather than engage in a new passion in a healthy way. This is where the people who make up your support network become crucial. When you cannot see your addiction coming back in a different form, they can. They can tell you to slow down and think about what you're doing.

Addiction swapping is not uncommon, but you can avoid it. Be aware of yourself and your addictive behaviors and rely on friends and family to tell you the truth. When done correctly, replacing your addiction with something better can be a wonderful experience.