

Insight for the **JOURNEY**

A daily inspiration for your recovery

Dr. Hal Baumchen

*Insight for the Journey is a daily email meditation designed to inspire and encourage. Whether you are a clinician or a client, you'll find recovery support on a wide variety of relevant topics. **Insight for the Journey** is written by Dr. Hal Baumchen, a psychologist, a licensed alcohol and drug counselor, a co-occurring disorders specialist and the author of the Journey to Recovery Curriculum Series. Each daily reading is filled with inspiration and information you need for the recovery journey.*



Addiction and Anxiety

Trying to Reduce Anxiety

In a co-occurring disorder treatment program, people come with a variety of mental health and substance abuse issues including social phobia and generalized anxiety. At first glance, it is perceived that alcohol has an anxiety-lowering effect, producing a state of relaxation and calmness. Although alcohol can reduce anxiety symptoms temporarily, those symptoms often return within a few hours. What starts out as a quick fix quickly leads to chronic

problems. Research has shown people with inherently high levels of anxiety are at an increased risk of becoming alcoholics.

Managing Anxiety

Substance use and mental health issues must be addressed at the same time. Low addiction-risk medications and counseling help people feel less apprehensive, sleep better, and bring an increased ability to concentrate. Utilizing the following anxiety management techniques help to reduce anxiety and thus decrease the cues and triggers to use alcohol as an inferior anxiety management tool.

1. Take inventory of your anxiety symptoms. Learn about the specific types of anxiety. This can reduce the fear and stigma as symptoms begin. Label the symptoms as trivial nuisances rather than dangerous problems.

2. Resist the urge to avoid. Temptation to avoid the thing causing distress goes up, along with anxiety. The more anxious and distressed you feel, the more you will want to avoid the stressor. In the short run, this may appear to be a good plan. In reality, it makes anxiety symptoms worse. It is better to learn to face your fear and overcome the thing causing the anxiety. Taking on small amounts of anxiety and reducing or managing the level of anxiety is a better long-term management practice.

3. Practice relaxation techniques in advance. Relaxation techniques include breathing exercises, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation. These techniques must be practiced in advance to be effective. Waiting until you are having a panic attack to implement these techniques would be too late. I suggest experimenting with the three major types of techniques, pick one you like, and practice it intently until you feel you have some mastery of it. Practice your preferred techniques several times each day, confident that in the long run, it will be useful to you during periods of high anxiety.

4. Recognize negative thoughts. Negative thoughts often come to us out of our awareness. As you grow in your recovery, you may be better able to recognize pessimistic and destructive thoughts as they come. Recognition of the negative and intrusive thought allows you to take it captive, weigh its validity, and accept or reject it. Following this recognition, refute and replace those negative thoughts. Develop a pattern where you rehearse positive substitutions using realistic and empowering self-statements.

5. Rest and relax. Set aside some time for relaxation and entertaining activities. Your body and mind are like a finely-tuned motor. If you push the motor too hard, under too great a load, you will burn it out. Regular intervals of downtime, rest, and relaxation will allow you to re-energize, de-stress, and reduce your overall load of anxiety.

Recovery is a journey. Enjoy the ride!

Dr. Hal Baumchen

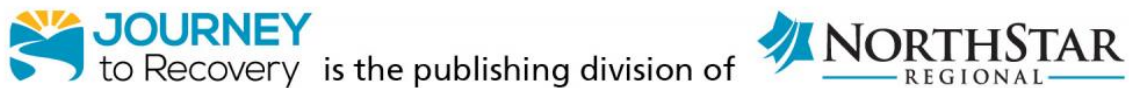
Read this daily Insight on Dr. Hal's blog at JourneyToRecovery.com



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For more information about co-occurring disorder treatment, visit northstarregional.com.

For information about substance use and mental health disorder curriculum and resources, visit journeytorecovery.com.



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