

# the häagen-dazs cure

## CAN SUGAR KEEP YOU SOBER?

### *Tools of Sobriety (Part 1)*

*This series deals with relapse prevention, starting with a tool called H.A.L.T.: Don't get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. The first article examines **hunger**.*

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**H**UNGER is a stressor which I must avoid in sobriety, like so many other stressors. Getting stressed makes me want to pick up. Getting sober for me wasn't just doing a single big thing right; it was doing a lot of little things right. Not letting myself get too hungry was one of those things.

Don't get too hungry? Eat. Easy, right? Wrong. The problem is that I didn't get hungry in early sobriety. I didn't eat breakfast in early sobriety because, as I told my sponsor belligerently, "I don't eat breakfast." Then, as the afternoon wore on, I still didn't get hungry. I just got crazy. I'd call my sponsor and go on about how the program was a cult and sucked, how the people in the program were phony and sucked, how my psychiatrist sucked because when I told him I was in the program he stopped prescribing Valium, how the entire world sucked because etc., etc., etc.

My sponsor would stop me there and ask if I had eaten anything today. Silence on my end of the line. "I wasn't hungry," I'd finally respond (belligerently again, of course—lots of that in early sobriety).

"Go eat something and then call me back," he'd tell me. Twenty minutes later, when I'd had a cheese sandwich and a glass of milk, I'd call him

back and, while the program still sucked, it didn't suck so bad and I guessed I'd stay in. The truth was that somewhere in my using days my hunger mechanism had broken. Perhaps this was just a small part of being completely out of touch with my emotions, but I didn't feel hungry, I felt unhappy (by mid-afternoon), then suddenly ravenous (by evening). When by mid-afternoon I wanted to kill somebody, I really just wanted a hamburger.

The solution? My sponsor had to teach me to eat by the numbers: if it's breakfast, eat breakfast even when I didn't want to eat. A small breakfast was okay—a bowl of cereal with milk, a glass of OJ, a cup of coffee. Anything quick and easy, but eat.

The same thing went for lunch: a quick trip to McDonald's for a cheeseburger and a shake. What my sponsor wouldn't allow me was to skip lunch—he consistently checked first whether I'd eaten, and

refused to talk further with me if I hadn't. Who can blame him—why should he waste his time talking to my hunger?

"But I can't eat all that, I'll gain weight," I complained. (This was a long time ago.) He urged me not to worry about my weight during my first six months—any weight I put on would come off in the second six months, and it did. He was a strong proponent of the Häagan-Dazs cure for addiction: a pint before bed every night. It was something to anticipate, in addition to the permissible intimate relationship with my hand. Because I originally thought the "H" in H.A.L.T. stood for—"horny." Oh, well... —Roy Y.

*Sometimes I felt like  
I wanted to kill  
somebody. But all  
I really wanted  
was a hamburger.*

*To be continued. In the next issue: **anger**.*

# TOOLS OF SOBRIETY

## PART 2: ANGER

NEVER GIVE IN TO ANGER! Deny you're angry! You have no right to be angry! Reject anger as weakness! Stuff anger!

Right? Wrong. If I'm angry, I'm angry. It's nature's inevitable reaction to fear or hurt, physical or emotional. I will be angry from time to time. I have to acknowledge anger and work through it.

Anger is a painful emotion. The "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous predicts that unprocessed anger will

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Or I can look at my part in the anger—for instance, my anger can be born of unreasonable expectations.

cause me to drink or use. "[Anger] may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for [addicts it] is poison" (p. 66). I tend to self-medicate pain. Thus I have to process my anger, whether it's fresh anger or a resentment I'm cherishing. But how do I process anger?

- My sponsor told me there are three ways to defuse anger: talk about it, talk about it, and talk about it. Talk to my sponsor, talk to my therapist, talk to my friends, talk to anyone who'll listen. I feel better after I tell someone how I was wronged or frightened or hurt. It helps if that person can understand how I feel and validate my feelings.

What if talking isn't enough?

- I can confront the person who made me angry. Perhaps I can't talk with an unsympathetic boss, but I can tell the

person who cut in front of me that I was there first.

- I can do something about the cause of the anger: take the defective merchandise back, complain to Channel 2's Consumer Helper, bad mouth the establishment to my friends, make a decision never to go to that meeting again. However, I need to be careful because I may eventually realize my anger was unjustified (perhaps while telling my sponsor) and need to make amends.
- I can look at my part in the anger—for instance, my anger can be born of unreasonable expectations. I may be angry because people at a meeting don't like me, but it's unreasonable to expect everyone to like me. My sponsor applies the Rules of 25: In any group I should expect 25 percent of the people to like me, 25 percent of the people to dislike me, and the rest to be largely oblivious of my existence. To expect anything different is to court anger.
- I can stop holding on to a resentment—whipping it up by endlessly replaying it and wallowing in the injustice. Let it go when it's time.
- I can laugh at myself. When I complain that my feelings have been hurt, my sponsor never calls me a big baby, but he might respond by telling me a story about how he can be such a big baby.
- I can pray for the person who frightened or hurt me (but preferably after I've taken other actions).

Anger is not only painful to the body, it is corrosive to the soul. I am the only one hurt by my anger.

—Roy Y.

*This is the second article in our series about a helpful tool of sobriety we call H.A.L.T.: Don't let yourself get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired. In the next issue: loneliness.*

The other day I got a call from London. A reporter for the gay magazine "Attitudes" was looking for information on CMA.

According to him, crystal meth is now paving its way through the gay scene in Britain's capital. "We know so little here about this drug," he said.

One look at our fellowship in New York should tell him enough. From one single meeting a week in 1998, barely attended by a handful of people, we've grown to 15 meetings a week (and counting), some of which can draw more than a hundred participants: step meetings; topic meetings; a meditation meeting; even a meeting to specifically explore the foundation of our program, the AA "Big Book."

And this is only the tip of the iceberg. All over North America, writes Will H. from Los Angeles (page 7), CMA's original hometown, our fellowship now counts over a hundred meetings. As crystal meth's grip on the gay community seems to be tightening, an increasing number of men and women are also seeking recovery from their addiction. There's help everywhere.

Yet we're still struggling. Whether with admitting powerlessness over our addiction (page 2), being overwhelmed by unfamiliar feelings like anger (page 3), or the pitfalls of dating in sobriety (page 4). Hopefully this second edition of CrystalClear will help some of you deal with these and other issues. Just so you know: You're not alone anymore.

—Marc P.

## BIG BOOK THUMPER STUMPER

DO YOU KNOW YOUR LITERATURE?

- 1 Upon reaching Step Ten, what does the "Big Book" say we will do if tempted by alcohol?
- 2 According to the "Big Book," what do many people in AA say is the most important fact of their lives today?
- 3 What does the "Big Book" suggest we pray for when completing our period of meditation?
- 4 What subject does the "Big Book" tell us we shouldn't be shy about?
- 5 When speaking of our character defects, what does the "Big Book" suggest we do in cases where we continue to cling to them and we will not let go?
- 6 What is the baffling feature of alcoholism and addiction as we know it?
- 7 The "Big Book" states that each alcoholic/addict is like an actor who wants to run the whole show. That we are forever trying to arrange what to suit us?
- 8 What are the 12-step promises?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 7

# TOOLS OF SOBRIETY PART 3: LONELINESS

MY FIRST YEAR WAS ACHINGLY LONELY. My friends had abandoned me when I got sober; those who had not were no longer suitable to my fragile sobriety. Even my lovers—drugs and alcohol—were gone. That I craved drugs and alcohol did not surprise me, nor that I had to break many habitual ways of living, but I hadn't expected sobriety to be so lonely. How could I assuage this loneliness?

The truth is that everyone is lonely in varying degrees during the first year. Most of us have lost our support networks, and one of our tasks in the first year is to resocialize. That takes time, and we have to tolerate some loneliness for a while. The key is not to get too lonely. Here's what my sponsor suggested, and what I did:

- I went to lots of meetings. Then I went to fellowship—the meeting after the meeting—to socialize and meet people.
- I shared at meetings about what was going on in my life and how I felt. People began to know me and opened up to me.
- I talked to my sponsor honestly and at length. (Yes, he wanted to talk with me—he wouldn't have volunteered to sponsor me if he hadn't, although that was difficult for me to believe). That was the beginning of developing a lasting relationship with him.
- I accepted phone numbers and gave mine in return. It's rude to give or accept a phone number and not reciprocate. Further, my sponsor insisted that within 24 hours I call everyone who was nice enough to give me his number, and that I at least

leave a message if I got a machine. I was embarrassed to make phone calls—the first call was usually awkward. I felt I had nothing in common with the person I had called, nothing to talk about. However, I found that when I let him talk about himself, he thought I was great!

- I helped someone with less time than myself. My sponsor noted that when I had seven days, I had six days more experience than someone with one day. My experience could help that person through his first week. Often, lasting friendships are

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based on mutual support. I soon found that I liked many people who were in my day count class in sobriety.

- I planned with classmates to do things on weekends: brunches, shopping, museums, movies. Weekends were my nemesis—too much unstructured time to do the devil's work. Better to be with people—even people I didn't (yet) like—than to be alone.
- I did service—I arrived at meetings early to set up chairs; I worked on an NYCMA Intergroup mailing. I could meet people and be part of the fellowship.
- I did not get a boyfriend—that is usually a very temporary solution, and it hurts.

In my Third Step, I learned to trust the process of getting sober. There came a time when I was not lonely any more.

—Roy Y.

*This is the third article in our series about a helpful tool of sobriety we call H.A.L.T.: Don't let yourself get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired. In the next issue: tiredness.*

## H.A.L.T. Don't get too Tired

First, I had to recognize that I was tired, because in early sobriety I was disconnected from my feelings. I often felt uncomfortable but seldom knew what was the matter. Fatigue masked itself as fear, irritability, crabbiness, hypersensitivity, and sadness.

When I realized I was tired, my immediate reaction was that I needed more speed. Sleep was irrelevant. I had a breakthrough when my sponsor showed me that I was, in fact, over tired, and that I needed regular sleep—8 hour a day (every day, think of that!). Moreover, I couldn't depend on feeling sleepy to go to sleep. To determine my bedtime I had to count back 8 hours from the time I had to get up. I had to sleep "by the numbers." If it was bedtime, go to bed.

The problem in early sobriety was that I often couldn't go to sleep. I would lie in bed for hours looking at the gray ceiling until I couldn't stand it any more. My sponsor assured me that no one ever died of sleeplessness, that it would shortly pass. I'm sure I responded to him with something containing the F-word. Nonetheless, over the first few weeks of sobriety, regular sleep came back.

When I am anxious or have trouble sleeping, my first suspect is caffeine. Caffeine is in coffee, tea, colas, certain green "dew-like" drinks, and most of the "energy" drinks (read the label!). Some of the "energy" drinks also contained ephedrine (also known as ephedra or ma huang), which also acts in me as a stimulant, like caffeine, only stronger. These also made me feel speedy and triggered me, so I avoided them like the plague.

I reduced my intake to a cup (not mug) of coffee in the morning, a caffeinated soft drink in the middle of the afternoon and a cup of coffee before a meeting. If I wanted to go to sleep at midnight, my last cup of coffee had to be before 6 pm. I found that I had to stop drinking caffeine at least 6 hours before I planned to go to sleep. Otherwise, I would lie in bed awake with my mind racing until the 6 hours had elapsed.

I learned to use good sleep hygiene. I did not nap late in the day (an hour midafternoon, though, was bliss). I stayed out of bed until the designated sleep time. Sometimes before retiring, I had warm milk or some sleepy-time tea, with a spoonful of honey. I washed, brushed my teeth, and had clean sheets on a good mattress. Eventually, I fell asleep and established a regular sleep pattern.

I recognize that everything hurt more when I was tired. I was sadder and angered more easily. I was more fearful. Life did not look so impossible, so hopeless, after a good night's sleep,

During the day, a good night's sleep gave me the strength to face early sobriety. At night, it gave me solace.