Q: My wife's drinking is really affecting our lives. What can I do to convince her to get help?

A: It would be helpful for you to start by getting information and support for yourself. When an individual's substance abuse has increased to the point where family and friends are concerned about them, the individual who is using is not always immediately receptive to going for help when they are asked. The defense mechanisms of denial and minimization are frequently displayed by the person whose alcohol use has become problematic. If they are directly confronted, they may become angry and resistant to hearing your initial concerns. It is best to explore additional information so the conversation can be as productive as possible when it is time to have it.

When pursuing resources, the sources below will have information readily available:

- Your EAP
- Your primary care doctor
- Alcohol and drug treatment facilities
- Al-Anon
- SAMSHA.gov

To move to the next step of obtaining help for your wife, here are some suggestions to consider:

Sit down and talk with your wife at an emotionally calm time regarding your concerns about her drinking. It is important that she be sober. It would be helpful to be prepared with a couple of specific statements that describe to her your concerns of how her drinking has been problematic. "I'm concerned that you drove with the kids in the car after you had been drinking. When you arrived home you were slurring your words." Offer

**THE IMPACT OF ADDICTION ON THE FAMILY**

By Mary Jo Hansen, M.Ed., LAC/LPC

When a family member is in serious trouble, many families will go to any length to help the one they love. It's as if their battle cry, whether spoken or unspoken, is, "All for one, and one for all." Unfortunately, with the diseases of alcoholism and drug addiction (Substance Use Disorders), this desire to be helpful can become unhealthy for both the helper and the addict.

Family members are confused by the change occurring in the one they love. They don't understand the increasing consequences and are baffled by how distant, angry, manipulative, self-absorbed, or careless their loved one has become. So they try to solve the problem, fix the stressors, manage the consequences, and blame or excuse the use of the substance. Their actions are often based on unconscious motivations; "If I keep hovering and worrying, I get to keep my illusion of control," writes Patricia Choate at Hazelden, referring to her experience in working families. The natural instinct to swoop in and fix things becomes chronic and incessant and eventually robs the family member of peace of mind.

These are some common behaviors that occur within families and friendships of a loved one caught in the cycle of addiction:

- **Denial:** Thinking, "She's not that bad," "He still works," "It's just a stage"
- **Enabling:** Bailing out of jail, paying fines, abusing substances with them.
- **Covering up:** Keeping the increased use, consequences, and behaviors a secret.
- **Controlling:** Pouring out the booze, limiting access to money, declining social invitations.
- **Compensating:** Taking over the addicted individual's responsibilities.

A common set of ideas many treatment facilities share with family members is the "3 C's:" "You didn't Cause it. You can't Control it. And you can't Cure it." This saying is an invitation to family and friends to begin the process of letting go and learn healthy ways of being in a relationship with an addicted person.

For more information about addiction, visit firststep-recovery.com and click on "Resources."

"Keeping in Touch" is a monthly publication for employees covered by The Village Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through their employer’s benefit package. If you have questions about your EAP benefit, or if you would like to access services, call 1-800-627-8220.
EXERCISE AND ADDICTION RECOVERY

Besides the many physical benefits that exercise provides, researchers are finding exercise to be beneficial on many levels to people in recovery from addiction.

Drugs of abuse release chemicals, or neurotransmitters, in the brain of the person using them, causing the initial euphoria and "feel good" of substance use. It turns out that physical exercise increases the levels of chemicals such as serotonin, dopamine, and noradrenergine in the brain too — the "runner's high" — but it does it without altering the natural production of these chemicals like drugs and alcohol do.

The presence of these neurotransmitters in the brain results in feelings of calm and well-being, contributing to decreased feelings of stress. Not only has stress been identified as the number one trigger for relapse, but it frequently plays a role in the development of substance abuse problems in the first place, as people turn to alcohol and drugs as coping strategies. Physically fit people are better able to handle the social, emotional, and physical effects of stress, decreasing the likelihood of relapse.

Another trigger for relapse can be insomnia, or difficulty sleeping. People in the early stages of recovery know that a good night's sleep can be hard to get. Exercise can help reboots and regulate the body clock, or circadian rhythm. It is especially effective when moderately intense exercise occurs 5-6 hours before bedtime. Exercise increases body temperature, followed by a gradual return to normal body temperature over several hours, resulting in sleepiness. Sleep quality is improved as well, with fewer wakeful periods in the night.

Research with rats and hamsters has provided insight into the relationship between exercise and recovery. In one study, after meth use, rats were divided into two groups. One group was allowed to be cage potatoes; the other group was made to run. The results showed that, not only did the active group have significantly less meth-induced brain damage, but they also experienced a profound positive effect on dopamine and serotonin receptors. The lazy rats showed a very slow return to normal brain function compared to the active group.

And research has shown that hamsters that ran had a much lower craving for alcohol than their non-active hamster buddies; the naturally released neuro-transmitters did their job. Studies show that alcohol cravings are lower in people who exercise than in non-exercisers, as well.

Anxiety and depression are naturally reduced by moderate exercise too, resulting in lower levels of medications needed to manage these early recovery symptoms.

Exercise boosts self-esteem and self-confidence, providing inner resources for continued sobriety. And, it provides a positive lifestyle change by developing enjoyable social and recreational activities that don't revolve around drinking.

So how much exercise, anyway? Well, not marathons; not even 10Ks, unless that's what you love. And the key is to find something you do love so you can stick to it. Here are some tips to get you started:

1. Check with your health care provider to make sure you're healthy enough to exercise.
2. Start gradually. You shouldn't be so sore you can't move, but you should be sore enough to know you did.
3. Joining a gym isn't a requirement, but if you don't, you might consider doing some research on home exercise programs. A good exercise program will include strength training, cardio, and flexibility work. Expensive equipment is NOT necessary! Invest in good shoes, though, if you're going to run or walk.
4. Consider working with a trainer once a month, if you do join a gym. They can help you keep your workouts fresh and interesting so you don't get bored.
5. Think about including a friend or your significant other in your program. It will make your exercise routine more enjoyable and give you some added accountability.
6. Set goals and reward yourself.
7. Move enough to break a sweat, get your heart rate up, and breathe a little fast. (Not dripping, pounding or panting, at least to start with!)
8. Drink lots of water.
9. Eat good lean protein and leafy green vegetables; they help regenerate neurotransmitters, which have been depleted by substance abuse.
10. Stick with it. It takes a while to establish a new routine, but you should start feeling the benefits very quickly. Who knows, maybe you will run a marathon!