

1

Admit you have an addiction.

Addiction can come in a variety of different forms, but no matter what you're struggling with, there's a way out. For Christians, relying on your faith can be a really important source of support in your recovery. Studies have shown that people with a strong sense of spirituality tend to find it easier to beat addiction.[1] Addiction is an illness, not a moral failing, and as an illness, you don't need especially high willpower to overcome it, just the right treatment.[2] We're here to walk you through the ways God can support your recovery and explain the best evidence-backed treatment options. No matter how hard recovery gets, remember that you can beat this.



The first step to addressing any addiction is acknowledging it. Simply saying out loud that you struggle with the illness of addiction is already a step on the road to recovery. It can be difficult to escape denial, but to do it, admit to yourself, God, and the people close to you that you have a problem with addiction and want to recover.[3]

As the Bible tells us, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 28:13). Admitting the truth, even if you're ashamed of it, brings you closer to God and recovery. If you're wondering if you're dealing with addiction, ask yourself if it's costing you money, time, or relationships with the people you love. Is it creating a sense of anger or self-loathing? If the answer is yes, you're well on your way to admitting that it's become a problem for you.[4]



2

Pray regularly.

Prayer is a source of strength for many Christians suffering from addiction. Not only does prayer bring you closer to God, but it also has been shown to reduce the severity of cravings. Take time to pray every day—remember that God is your companion in your struggle against addiction, and give Him thanks for being by your side.[5]

The Bible tells us that prayer can alleviate our fears: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God” (Philippians 4:6-7).

When you feel anxious or like you won’t be able to stay free from addiction, try repeating to yourself Psalm 23, which begins with “The Lord is my shepherd.” Many people draw strength by repeating this psalm, and you can too.[6]

3

Find support in your church community.



Your church community is there to help you. Whether this means giving you an outlet to talk about your struggles with addiction, directing you to resources to help you, or even praying for you, lean on them for support. Many churches already are an integral part of addiction treatment efforts and have programs in place to help addicts. No matter how much addiction takes from you, remember that you can find a home at church.[7]

Community is an important part of Biblical teaching: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

You may encounter some negative reactions from people in your community when you open up about your illness. They are not acting the way God wants us to, with love and compassion.

Remember that your recovery is more important than the judgment of others.

It’s okay to only confide in those you can feel that you can trust. You don’t have to be public about your struggles with addiction if you don’t want to be—the important thing is that you’re open and honest with some people who are close to you.

Keep yourself occupied with church activities.

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otherwise helping it grow can keep your days busy, and keep you from relying on your addiction to bring meaning to your life.[8]

The Bible warns us to stay away from idleness: "Laziness leads to a sagging roof; idleness leads to a leaky house" (Ecclesiastes 10:18).

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Stay away from things that trigger you.



Identifying your triggers can help you overcome them. Take some time to write down a list of what triggers your addiction cravings, and then think about ways you can avoid these triggers. Understanding these triggers can give you a sense of control over your addiction.[9]

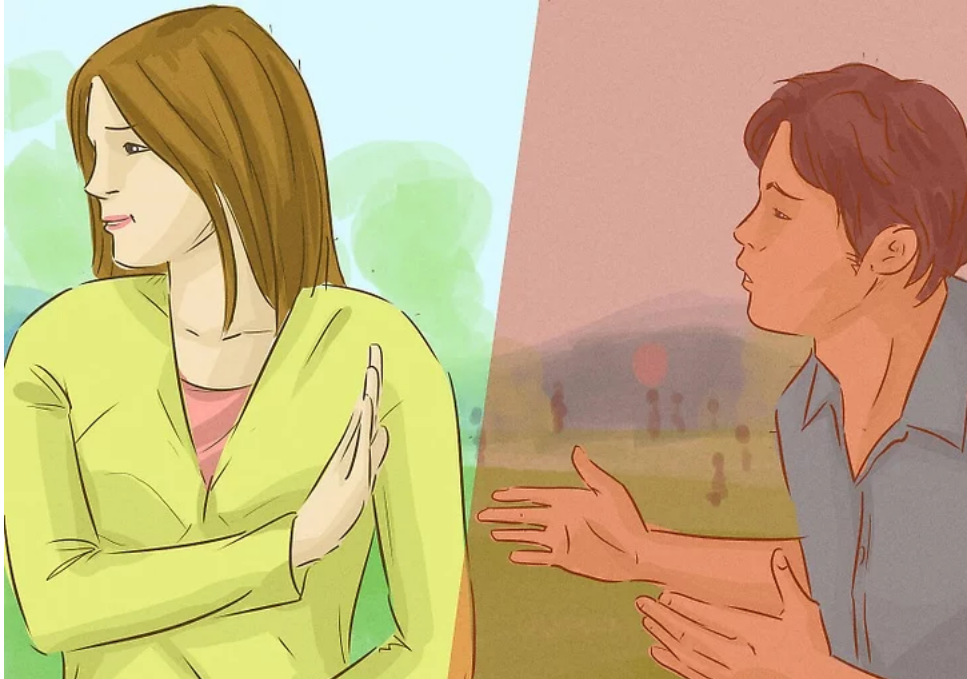
Remember that God believes in your ability to overcome addiction, even when you don't. The Bible tells us: "And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

For example, if you know that drinking during the day causes you to drink throughout the rest of the evening, try to avoid eating in restaurants with alcohol for lunch. If spending all day at home triggers your addiction to pornography, take regular walks.

Lean on your faith to get you through cravings. When you feel the urge to relapse, try saying a prayer and focusing on your relationship with God instead. Remember that He loves you and supports you.

6

Set boundaries with people who enable your addiction.



Boundaries can keep you away from triggering situations. If you have friends or other people in your life who put you in situations that tempt you to give in to your addiction, let them know that you're recovering and that you can't be in those environments anymore. This doesn't mean you necessarily have to end these friendships—Jesus was a companion to all kinds of people—but it does mean that you should set boundaries to keep yourself away from negative influences.[10]

Scripture warns us to be careful of whom we surround ourselves with: “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

For example, if you have a group of friends you normally go to the casino with, ask them to stop inviting you. Say something like, “I really value your friendship, but I'm working on getting my gambling under control. I'd be happy to see you, so long as it isn't when we're gambling.”

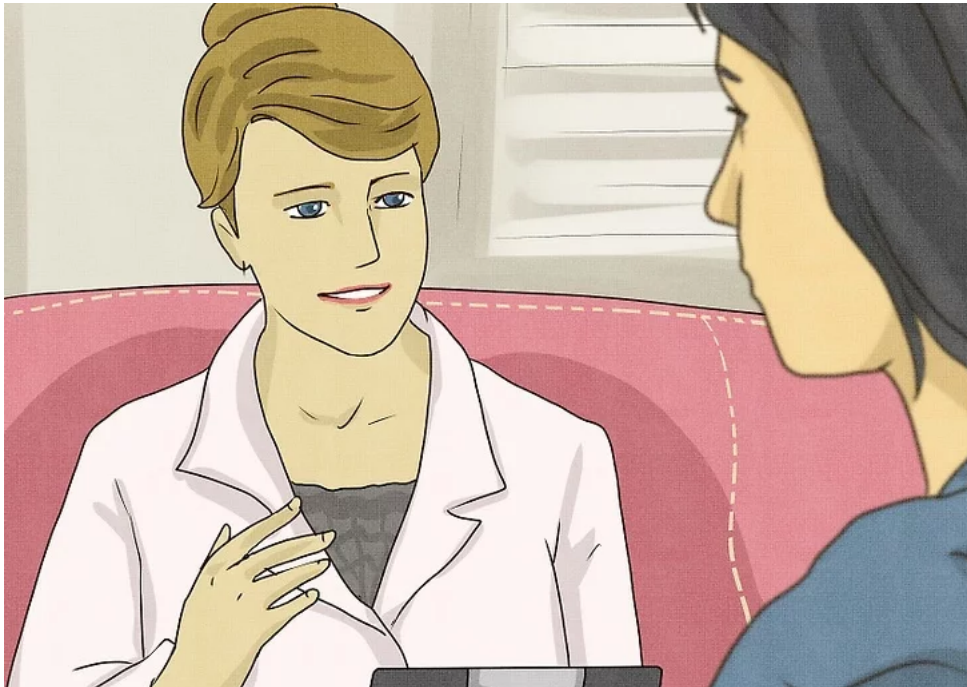
Try motivational interviewing.



Talking through your reasons to beat addiction can drive you forward. Motivational interviewing is a counseling strategy that has been shown to be successful in helping people struggling with addiction overcome this illness. A counselor trained in motivational interviewing will guide you through a conversation that can show you how your values can free you from addiction.[11] The Bible tells us to draw strength from one another: “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (Thessalonians 5:11). Reaching out to a counselor to help you ground your behavior in your values isn’t just the right thing to do: it’s Biblically encouraged.

Since many studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of motivational interviewing in beating addiction, there are plenty of therapists trained in this method. Try running an Internet search for counselors in motivational interviewing near you, or ask your doctor if they can help connect you.

Get help with cognitive-behavioral therapy.

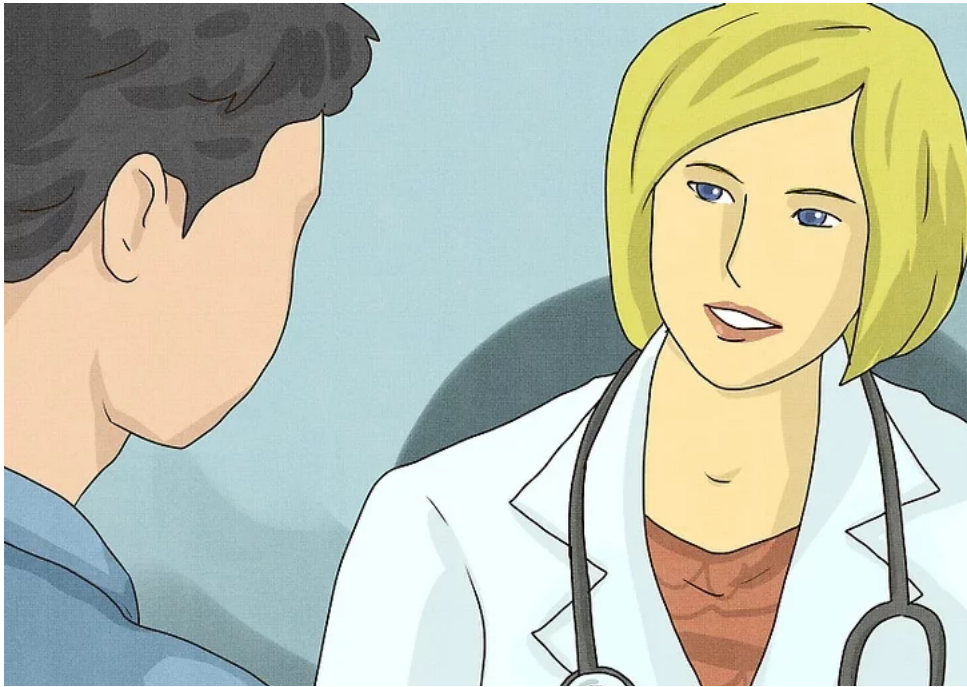


CBT is about giving you the tools you need to overcome addiction. There's scientific evidence that cognitive-behavioral therapy for addiction, which focuses on developing skills and coping strategies to keep cravings at bay, is an effective treatment. CBT is widely practiced among therapists, and working with one can make the process of recovery a successful one.[12]

The Bible tells us that seeking out the wisdom of others is an important part of our own development: "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

CBT is one of the major ways that therapy is conducted today, which makes things easier when trying to find a therapist that practices it. When seeing if a therapist is a good fit, ask if they have experience in treating addiction issues.

Talk with your doctor about medical treatments.



Medication prevents withdrawal symptoms from substance abuse. Although you might want to try and quit your addiction cold turkey, it can be very difficult or even dangerous to do this for certain drugs, like alcohol or opiates. There's nothing shameful about using medication to help you overcome your addiction, and if you feel stigma around this option, it's a good idea to talk through it with your doctor.[13]

Addiction is an illness, and the Bible encourages us to seek out medical help when we are ill. As the Book of Matthew tells us: "On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick'" (Matthew 9:12).

Talking to your doctor about pharmaceutical options to help you overcome addiction can be a crucial step in your recovery. Try to ignore people who tell you stigmatizing things like, "You're just going to be addicted to something else"—they likely aren't fully aware of how these medications work.

Stay at a treatment center.



A rehab program can give you the support you need to beat addiction. Ask your doctor if they have recommendations for a good rehab program, and do your own research. Studies have shown that short-term stays are less effective than programs that last at least 90 days, so consider a longer stay if it means being able to kick addiction to the curb.[14]

Staying in rehab can feel scary and difficult, but remember that suffering is not something to fear. As the Bible tells us: “We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope” (Romans 5:3).

Ask questions to any rehab program you’re considering about their model for treatment: whether they offer mental health services for patients with depression or anxiety, whether they test patients after leaving to see their success rate, and how long they’ve been operating. A faith-based rehab center may be able to speak to your spiritual needs better than a secular one. Even so, ask questions about whether their methods are evidence-backed and how they combine spiritual practice with medical treatment.

Reward yourself for reaching milestones.

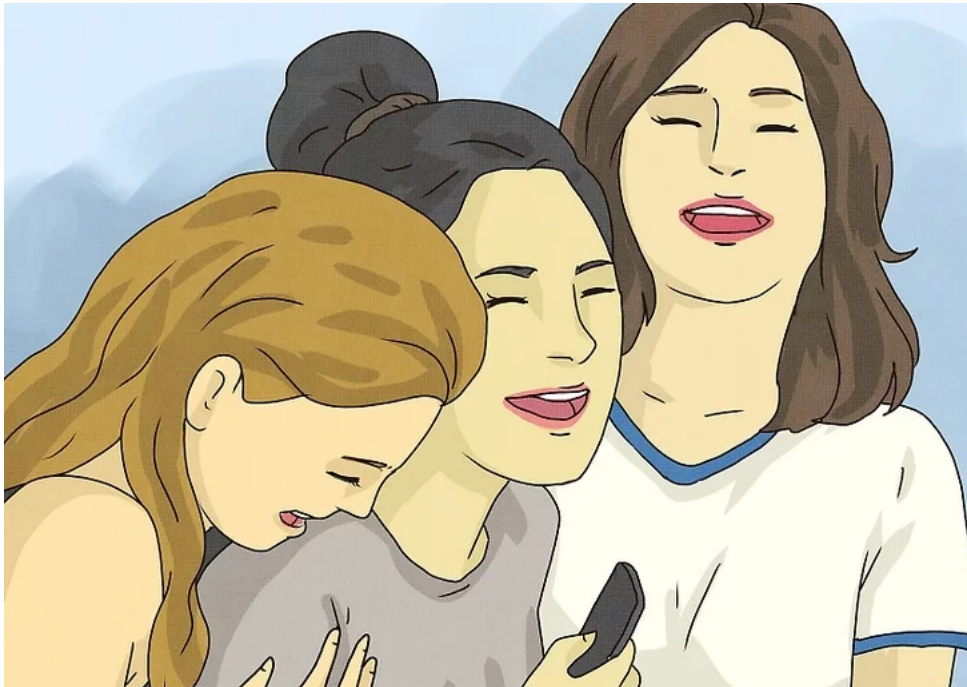


Positive reinforcement is a proven method for treating addiction. Contingency management programs involve giving you material rewards, whether financial or otherwise, for resisting addiction. Having a reward waiting for you if you meet your goals can be a great motivation for staying strong in the face of addiction.[15]

Understand that God wants us to be rewarded for our good work. As the Bible tells us: “And let us not weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). If you can’t find a contingency management program, ask a friend or family member supporting you in your recovery to give you a reward—whether a small amount of money or something that feels meaningful to you—every time you meet the goal of staying free from your addiction for a week.

There are apps that can help you track how long you’ve managed to resist your addiction. For example, the Smoke Free app on your smartphone tracks how long you go without cigarettes and gives you updates on how your health has recovered in the time since.

Consider living in a sober community.



Stay accountable with others who want to stay addiction-free. Sober living communities have been shown to help people stay away from drugs and alcohol. If you're worried that going home might keep you in an unhealthy environment, consider joining a sober living community until you can overcome your addiction.[16]

It can feel like a big step to leave your previous living situation behind in order to pursue sobriety. Remember that Christians, we sometimes have to make choices to keep ourselves on the path that God wants for us.

The Bible tells us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2).

To find a sober living community, try looking online. Many communities are open not just to people who are exiting rehab programs, but to all people in recovery.

Help others with their addiction.



Guiding others struggling with addiction keeps you on the right path. Many recovery programs include a sponsorship component, where you can help people newer to their battle against addiction succeed. Once you've been successful in keeping your addiction at bay for some time, consider helping others. Taking on this role has been shown to be remarkably effective at helping sponsors stay free from addiction.[17]

The Bible is well-aware of how we help others by helping ourselves: "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday" (Isaiah 58:10).

If you're unable to join a sponsorship program in your community, try using the Internet. Even supporting other people in their fight against addiction on internet forums can be really good for you.