

Lifestyle Balance

Posted by MenachemGYE - 28 Jan 2020 14:58

According to what is known as behavioral economics theory, when people in addiction recovery have access to a range of sources of pleasure, joy, and satisfaction, they are more likely to quit drinking or using drugs successfully. This theory has a lot of scientific evidence behind it.[1]

SMART Recovery dedicates a quarter of their program (Point 4) to the topic of Living a Balanced Life. The Fortify program also dedicates a quarter of their program (weeks 7,8 and 9) to this topic.

Regaining your health and creating a lifestyle that brings you long- and short-term satisfaction is an important part of recovery. Avoiding lapses and relapses, and achieving long-term behavior change is supported by living balanced life. Balance comes from finding and pursuing interests that you find absorbing, and achieving your short- and long-term goals.

A meaningful life is one that is in balance; you now have the time and desire to pursue the activities that express the values you identified in the Hierarchy of Values. Many people do not live their lives in balance or in a manner that consistently sustains their values. — The SMART Handbook

Here are links to a few SMART worksheets that deal with lifestyle balance:

1. [The Lifestyle Balance Pie](#)
2. [Hobby & Enjoyable Activities Worksheet](#). SMART Recovery loves abbreviations... This worksheet is called "Vital Absorbing Creative Interest" - VACI).
3. [List of ideas of activities you may enjoy](#)

This can be worked on during any point of recovery, but main time to focus on this is when we've completed the Action stage of recovery. See [here](#) for more info.

For more on this topic, read [this post](#).

[1] Glasner-Edwards, Suzette. *The Addiction Recovery Skills Workbook: Changing Addictive Behaviors Using CBT, Mindfulness, and Motivational Interviewing Techniques (New Harbinger Self-help Workbooks)* quoting Green and Kagel 1996; Higgins, Alessi, and Dantona 2002.

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Re: Lifestyle Balance

Posted by mggsbms - 02 Feb 2020 20:32

It would be nice to hear some ideas where VACI can replace lust. The link provided enumerates several different kind of acting out with a VACI substitute, but lust is not one of them. Maybe someone has some good ideas, please share.

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Re: Lifestyle Balance

Posted by MenachemGYE - 03 Feb 2020 11:04

I'm also very interested to hear if any experienced GYE members here have input on this.

In the meantime, here's some info from the GYE Handbook:

Alternative Fulfillment

We frequently focus on breaking the addiction by avoiding triggers and running **away** from the Yetzer Hara. But often the best way to deal with an addiction, is to remove the underlying "needs" that the addiction is trying to fill by proactively engaging in *alternative* fulfilling pursuits.

More often than not, an addiction is a psychological escape that we learned to use as a way to flee from the realities of life. If we can manage, in the early stages of the addiction, to keep ourselves occupied with healthy and fulfilling activities that we enjoy, and find more meaning in our lives, the addiction will often fade away of its own accord. Fulfillment often comes from finding realistic challenges and reaching the goals that we set for ourselves.

We should try to find new jobs or projects that will enable us to express our creativity, find enjoyment, and reconnect with life and the world around us. This will help fill the "void" that we were subconsciously trying to satisfy with unhealthy pleasure seeking. Some ideas can be found in our "Kosher Isle" (and especially in "Kosher Activities" section).

"False" fulfillment causes us to close up into ourselves and slowly destroys our lives and our souls. *True* fulfillment, on the other hand, helps us open up to the world around us and reconnect with our souls. Every Jew has a "G-d Hole", a place inside them that feels empty if not filled with G-d. Often, we subconsciously try to fill that feeling of emptiness with lusting. The best way to fill the 'G-d Hole' and achieve fulfillment and joy obviously comes from a true connection with Hashem. As the Pasuk says: "*Tamu U're'u Ki Tov Hashem – Taste and see that Hashem is good*", and "*Ve'hisaneg al Hashem– Find Pleasure in Hashem*". This can be built up by adding *Kedusha* to our lives, seeking a deeper connection with *Yiddishkeit* in general, and through learning Torah with enjoyment. Torah is like water, and **we can't put out a fire without water, even if we know it burns**. We can try to hook up with a new *chavrusah* or add a shiur to our daily/weekly schedules. See the Torah section of our Kosher Isle for more ideas on how to add Torah to our lives, and for links to many great websites of Torah audio and video shiurim.

We can also seek "*oneg*" (pleasure) in Mitzvos like Shabbos and Yom-Tov, through singing zemiros and spending quality time with our children. These things are also included in "*Ve'hisaneg al Hashem*" because *oneg* that is connected to Mitzvos has a *kiyum* (lasts). Yes, even good food on Shabbos can be a spiritual experience, as opposed to forbidden pleasures which leave us feeling empty inside (and that's why we want it again so soon afterward).

Other ideas to help us start living "outside of ourselves" and feel more fulfillment in general, could include *Chesed* projects or involvement in the community in various ways. If you are a *Bochur* in Yeshiva, you might try and get the job of organizing the *Otzar Haseforim*, running a canteen, providing dry cleaning services, haircuts, etc... If you are not learning and also unemployed, **try to find a job!** The main thing is to keep busy, reconnect to the world around us and find fulfillment in a variety of ways that will counteract the "false fulfillment" that the addiction tries to provide us with.

Rav Wolbe Zatzal in his Sefer "Psychiatry and Religion" (Pg. 82) suggests cultivating a combination of religious and social fulfillment to help our youth beat this challenge. He writes:

*The difficult phase of adolescence is fertile soil for feelings of guilt, especially for religious youth. Masturbation is a serious prohibition. Yet almost all youth stumble in this and are unable to find the strength to overcome this in any way. The result is feelings of guilt. This is where wise guidance from Rabbanim and Mechnchim becomes so necessary. As is known, a Rav is not licensed to "forgive sins" and surely not to permit the forbidden. However, he can guide, calm and bring the youth to acceptance of himself. And together with that, to cultivate an intensive social life and help bring the youth into the vast wealth of Torah, which can arouse in him a deep thirst to acquire and grow in Torah. As our sages have said, "Torah is good with Derech Eretz, for the toil in both makes sins be forgotten". In other words, the toil in Torah together with the toil of cultivating a thriving social life, brings to a situation where, over time, one forgets to sin. Instead of a constant battle, which is hopeless, through the **positive** hard work in Torah and a social life, slowly but surely, the youth will recover from masturbation. This is the conventional path of Chinuch that is accepted today. Yes, Torah life needs intensive chinuch. Without*

chinuch, there is no escape from youth sinking into feelings of guilt and despair.

Physical Activity

When we talk about recovery and emotional health, our physical body is a critical factor in the equation. Getting enough sleep, good nutrition and especially exercise, add a whole lot more to our "spiritual centeredness and emotional well being" than most people give it credit for. As the Pasuk says, "*Venishmartem Me'od Li'nafshoseichem* - and you shall vigilantly guard your wellbeing".

Often our addiction is fed by underlying emotional imbalances. If we are depressed, anxious or stressed, then as addicts, we will escape to our "drug of choice" - lust. Physical activity and exercise can be very beneficial in easing anxiety, stress and depression, which scientists tell us is often produced by an imbalance of neurotransmitters in the brain. Exercise not only impacts endorphins (our feel-good hormones), but it also increases levels of serotonin and dopamine, creating more balance. This produces the famous "runner's high," decreases anxiety, and provides an overall feeling of calmness.

At all levels of the struggle/addiction, it is very beneficial to engage in exercise and physical activities on a regular basis, at least a few times a week. Experience has shown that a consistent exercise regimen can be very helpful in combating addictive behaviors, and especially in dealing with the irritability and stress that are common withdrawal symptoms.

Exercising every day has been proven to positively impact an addict in many other ways as well. For example, in active addiction we can easily lose structure and meaning in our days. Regular exercise fills time and keeps the mind busy. It has been shown to boost self-esteem and self-confidence. We will also find that the self-discipline required and learned through regular exercise spills over into other areas of our life and will help us change our bad-habits. Exercise positively affects sleep, cognitive function and reduces cravings. It improves the mind-body connection and reduces symptoms of illnesses and disease. Exercise provides a healthy release for our frustrations, disappointments, anger, and negative energy, and makes us feel happier overall. People who exercise are more optimistic and happy than those who lead sedentary lifestyles. Research also suggests that burning off 350 calories three times a week through sustained, sweat-inducing activity can in many cases reduce symptoms of depression just as effectively as antidepressants.

Any form of exercise can help us boost our immunity to addictive tendencies, whether it's running, biking, walking or working out in a gym (make sure it's a kosher gym, or it can turn out to be more detrimental than beneficial to us).

Often we convince ourselves that we are too tired, or that we don't have the energy to make a commitment to start exercising regularly. The only way to overcome this mindset is through action. Start moving your body and let the details get worked out later. We may not feel like walking or jogging, but if we force ourselves to get out the door and hit the pavement, before we know it we'll be back home, breathing hard and feeling invigorated. In other words, we're not going to feel great some day and decide to go jogging or walking - it's the other way around. We

have to get out there and do it, despite how we may feel, and then we will be able to look back and see how our new routine has energized our lives and made it easier for us to stay clean.

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Re: Lifestyle Balance

Posted by MenachemGYE - 03 Feb 2020 11:33

Here's some more background on the value of pleasant activities.

Professional Sources

The 3 main rationales for increasing pleasant activities are[1]:

1. Often when we quit porn/masturbation we feel a void in life.
2. Many people focus too much on "shoulds" without balancing these with pleasures. This can lead to relapse.
3. Increasing pleasant activities improves our mood.

Alan Marlatt writes[2]:

Balance is defined here as the degree of equilibrium that exists in one's daily life between those activities perceived as external demands (the shoulds) and those perceived as activities the person engages in for pleasure of self-fulfillment (the wants)...

A lifestyle characterized by shoulds is often associated with a perception of self-deprivation and a corresponding need for self-indulgence. Probability of relapse is predicted to increase to the extent that the shoulds outweigh the wants, thereby increasing the likelihood that the individual will turn to an addictive activity as maladaptive attempts to restore balance.

In one of the addiction recovery programs suggested by the US government, there is a lot of talk about Recreational and Leisure Activities and Exercise. See [here](#), worksheets 21-23.

Moderation Management

The "Moderation Management" program also talks about finding more rewarding activities [3]:

"The idea is to increase the ration of things you *want* to do, compared to the things you feel you *should* do". "It's important to find activities and goals that can give you better experiences and more long-term rewards than [lust] can. The more you can discover and develop these, the more you will be drawn away from [lust]".

"Non [lust related] activities, whether ones we have done in the past or new ones we rediscover are what life is really about. Some of them bring our finest capabilities. As we engage in them, our true life comes back into being and progresses, and the allure of [lust] fades...

You need to find some fulfilling engagement of both the physical and intellectual aspects of your being. If you have a job, some of this may come from work, and some from outside activities."

Pleasant activities in the context of lust/porn

Gary Wilson in *Your Brain on Porn* thinks that when dealing with porn, it's good to focus on things that will help keep our brain in balance:

When you remove one source of dopamine (porn) it's vitally important to replace it with other, healthy sources of dopamine. As you consider which additional tools to try, keep in mind that heavy porn use is actually a synthetic substitute for the activities that naturally help keep your brain in balance. Not surprisingly, the most common tools employed include exercise, time in nature, creative activities, meditation, healthy diet, and socializing.

The Fortify program leaves it more open:

Anyone serious about beating their mortal enemy needs more than guts and courage. They also need the wisdom to take especially good care of themselves...both physically and emotionally...

This means looking around for anything we can do – even and especially on our worst days – to feel, as Jane would say, "just a little bit good or happy or powerful."

For some, this could include getting better sleep, or having a killer meal or an uplifting conversation with a friend. For others, it could mean a bit of meditation, time in a book or praying. Still for others, engaging in one of their passions or hobbies does the trick.

So what about you: What are your "power-ups" that replenish your energy? What refreshes you emotionally or mentally or physically? What boosts your morale?

Footnotes:

1. Hester and Miller p. 225
2. Relapse Prevention (p. 290)
3. Moderation Management Ch. 9

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I hope this offers some food for thought...

Re: Lifestyle Balance

Posted by MenachemGYE - 03 Feb 2020 12:02

In SMART, pleasant activities get a special tool called VACI. Depending on your background, you might feel guilty about putting so much focus on seeking pleasurable activities. What about ??? ????? ????? ???

In another new program ("Group Treatment for Substance Abuse: A Stages-of-Change Therapy Manual" - meant to be used by therapists), the focus on finding pleasurable activities is played down a little. It doesn't get its own tool, instead it's grouped together with the other aspects of lifestyle balance.

Many times, we need to strengthen the areas we may have neglected in order to function well and minimize the potential for future problems. We are entering a new phase of our lives. There may be some "catching up" to do in order to meet our basic needs, live healthy, well-rounded lives, and have fun, enjoyment, and excitement in our lives.

Here's the full list of areas to explore:

- Body (health, food, diet, personal appearance)
- Play (sports, hobbies, entertainment)
- Sociability (friends, coworkers, establishing trust with others)
- Family (marriage, having children and taking care of them, caring for elders)
- Work (job skills, particular responsibilities at your job)
- Education
- Career
- Money (salaries, budget, savings)
- Membership (participating in clubs, recovery support groups, professional orgs)
- World (politics, environment, social justice)
- Dignity (self respect, self esteem, actions consistent with your values and standards)
- Situation (outlook on life, moods and emotions, general assessment of how things are going)
- Spirituality

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As from Jews, we'd add also an area for learning Torah, Avodas Hashem, chessed etc. Like in SMART's lifestyle pie, we need to identify areas of your life that may have been neglected due to lust/porn/masturbation, prioritize which areas are most important, and brainstorm what can be done to improve those areas.

Source: <https://www.centerforebp.case.edu/resources/tools/group-treatment-for-substance-abuse-a-stages-of-change-therapy-manual>

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Re: Lifestyle Balance

Posted by mggsbms - 03 Feb 2020 15:50

Thank you! all great resources and ideas!

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Re: Lifestyle Balance

Posted by Hopeforallofus - 10 Feb 2020 16:26

I'm fighting this and agree with much, unfortunately and I think that is why there has so many issues in my life is a combo of low self esteem and this black and white view of good and bad. Breathing is normal, interest in sex is normal. The future of us would not happen without it. I grew up with much violence and I was told the pain I was feeling was love. Porn was a way to numb the hurt and the isolation I developed a warped sense of self a lack of self esteem and an overwhelm that caused me to space out. I'm slowly bringing myself back therapy, religion, activity, more meaningful work. My father had no hope growing up and full of PTSD.. I was taught to work hard but never taught why. My parents fought a lot there was a constant fight or flight feeling in my house. There was a randomness to everything. I didn't masturbate but I looked at a schmutz and I felt so alone. My sex therapist says that masturbation is normal and there are health benefits. Ideally having sex with a partner is best and not overdoing anything. Along with a goal of trying to live a balanced life. It's hard as I do not have kids and my gf is not happy with me right now. Porn for me is bad it hijacks me takes my soul away. I have been working so hard and feel so sad that my circumstances made me give up. Baruch hashem please restore me restore my resolve and energy so I can take stronger action. Let me again feel joy for the things I am to enjoy and avoid the things that cause me pain. Let me be still. Finally let me feel sad for those that I hurt but not sad for me.

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Re: Lifestyle Balance

Posted by Hopeforallofus - 10 Feb 2020 16:31

Thanks!

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