



A WELLNESS PLAN

Unlock Wellness

- The mission of Fresh Hope for Mental Health is to empower individuals to live a full and rich faith-filled life in spite of a mental health diagnosis.
- The vision of Fresh Hope for Mental Health is to equip and empower individuals (and their loved ones) who are affected by a mental health diagnosis to live a full, rich and purpose-filled life in wellness and wholeness (mental, physical and spiritual) through participation in local Fresh Hope groups which are Christ-centered peer support groups, as well as online forums, educational opportunities and faith based mental health resources.
- Fresh Hope is a peer-to-peer Christ-centered wellness approach to mental health recovery based upon six tenets that empowers people to connect both their faith and recovery principles. This approach both empowers and encouraging individuals live full and rich lives in spite of their diagnosis.

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Fresh Hope

The Keys to Successful Recovery

Staying in recovery could be the hardest work. It's ongoing and it's difficult, but it's well worth it. There are some common setbacks and typical hesitations that those with a mood disorder may experience while working through recovery.

Following are the keys of wellness that people in recovery have come to understand. Each of these keys is also what we in Fresh Hope call a "Wellness Plan." In other words, each of the following is a key aspect that one must put into action to move into wellness.

1. Connections

First of all, you're going to need connections. The right connections with the right people: Encouraging people, hopeful people, safe people, people with a positive outlook, people who truly love you and who truly care for you, people who are going to tell you the truth even though it may be hard to hear, people who will hold you accountable, people who are going to help you forgive yourself, people who are going to forgive you when you mess up.

Here are some of the connections that will be instrumental in your recovery:

- *A Trusted Doctor* – You've got to be able to tell your doctor everything and anything. The more they know, the more they can help you. The less they know, the less likely they will be able to help you.

- *A Therapist* – Someone you trust, one who is wise, and who helps you move forward. Not all therapists or all doctors are the same. They all have a bit of a different approach. You've got to find a therapist who works for you, one you feel safe with, but also who's going to challenge you to grow and step outside where you're at presently.

- *A Support Group* – People who are going through similar things are crucial. There will be people in that group who are farther down the line than you are and others who have just begun. I find that to be very powerful and very helpful. I believe peer support groups are one of the most helpful things in recovery.

- *Old Friends* – A friend or two who's known you for a long time, hopefully before mental health issues got in the way of your life. They're going to tell you the truth with love. They're going to be there for you no matter what.

- *New Friends* – A friend or two who maybe are a few miles down the road in their recovery, who can encourage and help you know that it's going to be okay.

- *Loved Ones* – Our family and friends who we truly love and who love us. In recovery, many times we have a lot of relationships to mend and take care of.

After that's done, some of those people are the most loyal people to help you.

Your family, whether they like it or not, is part of your recovery. They need knowledge about your recovery. You can also help them learn about your recovery. In addition, you will need to permit them to speak the truth to you in love, and you must agree that you won't become defensive or take offense to what they say.

- *Social Interactions* – Work in recovery is not all focused on the symptoms or the problems, but also relearning to have confidence in being in social settings with people—and enjoying relationships.

2. Goals

The second key is that you need goals. You must have goals, something that you're moving towards. What do you want your life to look like? Are these realistic goals? Moving toward something is by far more empowering than moving away from it.

3. Knowledge

You must actively learn about your disorder. Learning about mental health through your doctor or therapist is passive learning. They have a lot of information that they can provide and you can learn from it. But actively learning about your own disorder – reading books, doing your own research, checking out blogs and websites – is active learning. When searching the web, verify the information to make sure it is credible. Subscribe to magazines such as “Bipolar Disorder” (BP Magazine) or “Esperanza,” a magazine for those suffering from depression. Read and read and read. Talk to other people. Pick their brains. Find out from them what has worked. Knowledge will also be gleaned from your support group. It’s important, as we do in Fresh Hope, to cover topics about life in general. Understanding your disorder helps you understand how it plays out in your own life and for others as well.

4. Faith

The next key is faith – confident that the Lord loves you, having a faith that’s encouraging, uplifting, and is Gospel-oriented. It is faith in knowing that God hasn’t left you and your coming to understand that a mental health issue is not a flaw in your character, nor is it a lack of faith. Do you belong to a church or do you have a place to worship? Do you have a faith-based community that you can lean on and learn from?

Do you have access to the Bible and a spiritual mentor to hear God's Word? These things can all help you put things into perspective.

When people come in and say how depressed they are, we would not just encourage them to pull up their spiritual bootstraps, read the Bible more, and be positive! There is a lot more to this depression than just "pulling up their bootstraps."

Faith is the foundation. You must have faith and believe in God's power, and then apply everything else you know. "Sometimes God lets you hit rock bottom so that you will discover that He is the rock at the bottom."

5. Hope

As you enter recovery, there will be days and times when you feel hopeless and that having hope seems impossible. This is when you remember this point and recite the following words over and over: "No matter how I feel today, I have hope." You do not have to have it all figured out to move forward. Here's a good acronym for *HOPE: Hold On, Pain Ends*.

6. Focus

You might call it "perseverance" or "tenacity," because recovery takes time, and it's a process. You will experience setbacks here and there. You're going to have medicine changes and situations that leave you frustrated and wanting to give up.

There are going to be days that are better than others, and there are going to be some difficult days. Every now and then, you may revert to old habits and old ways of thinking, but don't quit. Don't give up. Focus on your goal(s) and keep moving forward. Persevere through the tough times and remember that tomorrow is a new day.

7. Self-Awareness

Another key to successful recovery is self-awareness. Many times when we are in our disorder we've learned to avoid being aware of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors because too often, it's too painful or too difficult. We go about life and give in to our mood disorders. But recovery requires us to become aware of our behaviors and ourselves. You must pay attention to yourself, how you feel, what your thoughts are focused on, how you are acting, and what your schedule is like.

At the beginning of recovery, it is extremely helpful to keep a mood chart. This will give you information about your moods and allows you to pause and identify potential triggers.

Are you talking too much? Maybe not talking enough? How's your mood? What are your triggers? What sets you off? What can you do to be proactive about those triggers and how can you work through them so they don't trigger you as much, or at all? Are you making good choices?

Journaling can help you as well. Write about what you did each day. Write about your feelings. This will also help you see progress. After a few weeks or months, you'll look back at your journal entries and realize just how much things have changed and how much you've grown.

8. Honesty

Honesty is an extremely important part of recovery. To get better we have to be truly honest with ourselves first and foremost. We've got to be honest with what we're thinking and why we do what we do. As painful as it might be, we've got to be honest with how we've been in the past.

Honesty includes completely opening up and telling things to the appropriate people and not holding anything back from them. For instance, sometimes we like to tell our doctor one thing, and then fail to mention that detail to the therapist, but bring up something else to the therapist. All of our key connections involved with our care and recovery need to be informed of everything.

Being open, honest, and transparent, especially with those who are helping you, and within a safe group such as Fresh Hope, can allow you to begin to receive feedback about yourself. That feedback begins to help you change, and it helps you to see yourself more accurately. There are always those things that other people see in us that we don't see in ourselves, behaviors that we do need to know so we can grow and change.

9. Accountability

Accountability is an extension of honesty, and we believe that if you want a successful recovery, it's imperative to have a circle of accountability. A circle of accountability involves placing yourself smack dab in the middle of a circle with a group of safe people around you. This would include people such as your doctor, therapist, pastor, a trusted friend or two, people with whom you feel safe, who care about you and want to see you get better. This circle may also include a peer from your support group or a peer that you've known along the way, and one or two loved ones. Keep the group at five, no more than six, and no fewer than four, and include people from different aspects of your life. Allow those people to have access to your entire life, permit them to give you feedback, and also connect them so that they can speak to one another and share observations and progress.

It's important for these folks to have access to your doctor and for your doctor to have access to them, and the same way with your therapist. That might be scary, and it takes a lot of trust in order to do that, but it's so important. We have learned how to play the game, to a certain degree, and we can hide certain things from certain people. The more the people who love and care about us, who are safe and truly invested in our recovery, are involved and fully informed, the better off we are.

10. Attitude

You need attitude. Not just any attitude. You need some real 'tude! A positive attitude, a positive outlook. You need to detox that brain and detox your thinking and get rid of the stinkin' thinkin', start to push forward and say, "I'm going to beat this. I'm going to overcome this. No matter what."

11. Laughter

Another key to successful recovery is laughter. You've got to laugh. Laughter helps your physical health and your mental health. It gets oxygen into your cells, increases your endorphins, and it helps your serotonin levels. Too often, depressed people find other depressed people to spend time with. Find people to be around who make you laugh and who will help you find humor again. This will help your recovery

12. Sleep

Sleep might seem like something that isn't that important, but for someone with a mood disorder, a regular sleep schedule is imperative. It must be a schedule that you and your doctor have agreed upon that is best for you, one in which you don't sleep too much and you don't sleep too little. Even people without mood disorders will tell you how the lack of sleep affects their mood.

13. Medicine

Most likely, or in many cases, your doctor will have prescribed at least one medicine, possibly more, to help treat your mood disorder. Medication needs to be taken as prescribed. This must be followed according to your doctor's instructions. Medicine cannot be effective if it's taken off and on, hit and miss. If you're not compliant and not taking it as prescribed, then the doctor will not know if the medicines are the right ones. Take them in the right amount at the right time, all the time. Let me say that again: Take the right amount at the right time, all the time.

You might have to put up with some side effects initially, at least for the short term, while your body adjusts to the medicine. Sometimes the side effects are long-term, but even with these, it's worth it. That's where you need to determine, along with your doctor, if you can live with those and if they're worth it for you. And yes, sometimes medicine causes hunger, and that hunger, of course, causes weight gain. Just remember, the medicine is helping regulate your brain so that you can live your life and be well.

14. Exercise

Exercise improves everyone's physical and mental health. Many studies show that people who exercise regularly benefit with a positive boost in mood and a lower rate of depression. When you exercise, your body releases endorphins, chemicals that trigger a positive and energizing outlook on life.

Simply put, it's for everybody, including those of us with mood disorders. It's important to get outdoors. It can be as simple as taking a walk. Taking in sunlight if at all possible is extremely helpful to one's mental health. Fresh air helps, even in the wintertime. Now of course, exercise is extremely important if you've had any weight gain due to medicine because it will help burn more calories. Join a gym, start exercising with a friend, or just try to move a little bit more, starting with at least 10 minutes a day. This small step will make you feel so much better.

15 .Diet

There are a number of medicines that are prescribed for mood disorders that cause weight gain, and that's all the more reason to watch your diet. It's not easy to do. It seems as though some medicines particularly cause an increase in specific cravings, such as for carbohydrates. Early in recovery it is important for you to accept that weight gain might be part of the process.

However, if you know up front that this is a possibility, you can establish a plan to work through this side effect and set specific goals for weight management and controlling your diet.

Low-fat, low-carb options will most likely be best for this purpose. Find a way to incorporate fruits and vegetables into your daily food intake, and limit the amount of sweets and high-fat foods. This will be difficult at first, because you may feel down about the process, and this could lead to eating unhealthy foods as a way to cope and deal with the stress. Many of us can relate to this! But you could ask someone close to help you to have healthy choices on hand so you can reach for a piece of fruit instead of a cupcake or cookie.

Many resources can be found online that can help you make a plan for healthy eating. This link to WebMD specifically talks about diet suggestions for those with bipolar disorder:

<http://www.webmd.com/bipolar-disorder/guide/bipolar-diet-foods-to-avoid>

16.WRAP®

Another key to successful recovery is having a WRAP® (Wellness Recovery Action Plan®). This program helps you develop a plan of self-management skills that will help you move forward in your recovery. Go to their website,

www.mentalhealthrecovery.com/wrap, to find trainings across the country and a variety of resources on how to build your WRAP®

17. Giving

It's important to your recovery to give back, to give of yourself, and to do things for others instead of just focusing on yourself.

Sometimes when we continually focus only on ourselves, we get so inwardly focused that we can't see anything or anyone outside.

Helping others helps us do just that, get outside of ourselves. Mood disorders demand our attention. They can be like spoiled little rotten monsters that demand more and more of us all the time. But when we focus on others, it helps our mood. We feel better. We feel better in regards to having helped someone else. It enables us to focus on them and their needs, as opposed to ourselves and our needs.

Giving of ourselves also helps us see that what we've been through has enriched our lives and brought a certain amount of empathy and ability to help others. This wouldn't be the case had we not gone through those things.

This list of keys for successful recovery may seem very overwhelming at this point. Truly you can't set out to do and accomplish them all in a short amount of time, and sometimes you have to start where you're able and work on a few things, one at a time, and add more as you can.

It's very important in recovery to understand that you do what you can when you can. Yet you always have to push yourself just a little more than what you're comfortable with because your mood disorder's going to tell you, "No, no, no, no, I'm not comfortable!" If you only do things you're comfortable with, you're probably going to end up just where you've always been. You can't keep doing the same things over and over, yet expect different results. What you put up with, you end up with. So it's important that you have just enough discomfort that it's getting you outside of your 'normal' behavior.

For whatever reason, it seems like so many times folks who are in recovery end up sabotaging their own recovery.

Among a host of reasons, probably one of the main reasons we easily end up sabotaging our own recovery is because it's hard work. And we either get lazy or feel like we're failing at it, so we just give up: creating some kind of issue that sabotages our total recovery. We may or may not even be conscious of the fact that we are doing it.

And let's be honest, sometimes staying stuck in recovery is easier than the hard work of pushing through. Sometimes staying sick becomes our identity. It is said that sometimes one does not choose to get better until the pain of staying sick is greater than the pain of recovery.

It is also true that we often lack self-confidence. Chronic mental health issues many times rob us of our self-confidence. And so we believe that we can't do something just because we don't have confidence that we can do it, so we go ahead and sabotage it before we naturally fail at, let alone attempt, it.

We do know this: for whatever reason you might find yourself sabotaging your recovery, if you really want to get well, it's imperative that you come to terms with why you are sabotaging.

For instance, there was a young person who was having one hospital stay after another. It was as though they were stuck in a revolving door that went in and out of the hospital over and over. After a brief discussion with this person, they said that they felt safer in the hospital. Life outside of the hospital was more complex, had more conflicts, and was more difficult. But, because they were not willing to really face what was going on, this person was in fact sabotaging their own recovery. Getting honest about that fear has helped this person move forward in their own recovery.

Be aware of any self-sabotaging tendencies that you have. Identify them. Deal with them.

One important question you have to ask yourself many times in recovery is, “When is the last time I learned something new, or did something new, or thought something new?”

That is always a good indicator if you are growing or staying stagnant. None of us will arrive at perfection. There are no perfect people, including those who don't have mood disorders.

Recovery is not about perfection. Recovery is not about avoiding mistakes. Recovery is about overcoming the mood disorder – each day. In fact, every day has to be taken one day at a time, one step at a time. Keep putting one foot in front of the other, and you will develop your keys to success – or if you will, the tools for wellness – one by one, bit by bit. Then you simply keep moving.

One day you'll look back and say, “Wow! There has been so much accomplished! I've really made it a long way.” All of us, until we take our dying breath, always have some way to go.

Many years ago someone asked, how do you eat an elephant? The answer: take one bite at a time.

Recovery can look like a huge elephant, and it will sit on your chest when you look at a list like this, especially if you're initially in recovery. How do you start? What do you do?

Take one bite at a time. Pretty soon, those keys start unlocking all kinds of doors for you, and it all begins to fall into place. And suddenly, you'll find yourself filled with Fresh Hope.



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