

# RECOVERY

*The official newsletter of the  
Fletcher Group Rural Center Of Excellence*



IT'S YOUR MOVE

2

WHAT'S TO EAT?

3

TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT

4

## TO YOUR GOOD HEALTH!

*by Founder and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ernie Fletcher*

Neuropathway and transmitter aberrations in the Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) caused by substance use can make it difficult for those in recovery to fully utilize the therapy and treatments they receive. The need to restore neurotransmitter function in the PFC is one reason why exercise, nutrition and immune system health are so important.

But as with most things, knowing *what* to do is one thing and *how* to do it another. We should remember that lifestyle changes that occur too quickly can feel like punishment and unintentionally trigger re-use.

Another consideration is anhedonia—the loss of pleasure common to those recovering from stimulants such as cocaine and methamphetamine. Such individuals may need more time to feel the joy others find in exercise and healthy eating.

Keeping body and soul together has been a tall order for all of us this past year. So, together with the exercise, nutrition, and rural vaccination advice provided in this issue, we wish you a Happy New Year full of good health and happiness.



# IT'S YOUR MOVE

Exercise increases abstinence rates, eases withdrawal symptoms, and reduces anxiety and depression.\* But if it does all that, and can be done anywhere and anytime, why don't we do more of it? The answer's simple: We take health for granted, and not without reason. Our bodies hang in there no matter how badly we treat them, and the miraculous things they do—the warding off of disease, the cellular regeneration, the touching, feeling, seeing, hearing—all occur automatically. Why fix what's not broken?

## Go Ahead, Use Me

But the body's fragility is well known to those in recovery. The newly sober are also aware of what can happen when cravings meet boredom. Mastering the art of "structured distraction" is key. And of the distractions available, exercise may be the best.

## Run, Forrest! Run!

Stress is part of life. The best we can do is give it a healthy outlet, as Forrest Gump did. When reflection brings only misery, more action and less thought is not a bad bargain.

## You Can Feel It!

But there's more to exercise than distraction. Endorphins released during exercise can produce happiness and euphoria—the same feelings once sought through drugs and alcohol. And the same endorphins, interacting with receptors in the brain, decrease the perception of pain.

## A Little Goes A Long Ways

We don't need to run coast to coast like Forrest. According to the Mayo Clinic, just 30 minutes of exercise a day can create a positive change in mood. And as increased blood flow raises oxygen levels and the body becomes more

physically fit, daily activities become easier, creating a greater sense of overall energy and well-being.

## Sleep It Off

Research also shows that 150 minutes of moderate to intense physical activity each week can enhance sleep quality by up to 65 percent—a crucial improvement for those who find it hard to sleep.

## “Self-Efficacy”

The term invented by Albert Bandura refers to the quiet confidence gained from mastering a skill or accomplishing a goal. Positive feedback loops can be created through something as simple as jogging or working out where the results become tangible and visible in the form of greater endurance, a stronger immune system, and improved skin and muscle tone. Do it with friends and it's even more fun!

## Just Move

There's no better bang for the buck—all kinds of exercise can be done at home or outdoors with little cost or risk. And it's okay to start modestly with a daily walk or hike.

Exercise isn't the answer to everything, but it's one of the few things that's proven to help everything else.

\*According to an analysis of 22 different studies conducted by the National Institutes of Health.





# WHAT’S TO EAT?

Data suggests that half of those in recovery have co-occurring eating disorders and one in four have suffered chronic malnourishment. Those who grew up in households with little support for balanced eating habits may never have learned how to nourish their bodies. And many, when "dopesick," likely learned to skip and even postpone meals in order to prolong their intoxication. Some may be so out of touch with healthy eating habits that they perceive a craving for substances when they’re actually just hungry.

## Absorption Challenges

There can be other complications. Opiates are known to harm the gastrointestinal system, causing chronic constipation that makes eating painful. And when stopped, diarrhea and vomiting can result, leeching the body of nutrients and causing dehydration and electrolyte imbalances. In some cases, a gradual increase in fiber intake is the only way back to health once opioids have hijacked the digestive system.

## Nutrition’s Role In Abstinence

Nutritionally-balanced meals at regular times are critical not only because they protect one's health. They're also important because of what can happen without them. The anxiety, irritability, and fatigue caused by low blood sugar and dehydration can be powerful triggers for re-use.

## General Guidelines

So what is a balanced meal for those in recovery? Experts recommend a diet high in complex carbohydrates, moderate in protein, and low in fat and sugar. Nutrient-dense foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fish are also recommended for their ability to decrease inflammation and reduce cell oxidation.

And don’t forget water. Because those recovering from addiction tend to be dehydrated, it’s wise to drink plenty of it, both with meals and between.

## A Time For Learning

According to the American Dietetic Association, education can do much to improve the outcomes of substance use treatments. Just as patients with diabetes or heart disease receive nutritional guidance to help manage their diseases, people in recovery can benefit enormously from nutrition education that takes specific risk factors into account. In other words, well-planned meals are valuable not only in the short term; they can also instill an awareness of the healthy eating habits needed for long-term abstinence.

## A Time For Celebration

Good food can be an amazing blessing for those in recovery, one that becomes even more dynamic and invigorating in the company of loved ones. The old saying, "Laughter is brightest where food is," speaks to the joy of a shared meal.

But another old saying may be good to keep in mind as we work to promote nutrition's role in recovery: “People who give you their food give you their heart.”



# TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT

Immunizing 300 million Americans against COVID-19 may be the nation’s most ambitious public health effort ever, one that could be more challenging in rural areas due to distribution complexities and deficiencies in healthcare infrastructure.

## Delivery Challenges

Because it must be stored at minus 94 degrees, the Pfizer vaccine is shipped in dry-ice-packed containers that serve as temporary storage for 15 days after arrival. Each container carries a GPS sensor that tracks location and temperature. The Moderna vaccine can be stored at normal refrigerator temperatures for up to 30 days.

## Who Gets What When?

Federal guidelines prioritize healthcare workers, but in practice it’s up to each state, as is the decision to include Recovery Residences in the same “congregate living” category as retirement homes.

## Rural Distribution

Pfizer packages contain 975 doses, too many for sparsely populated communities, so a “hub-and-spoke” model will likely rely on larger regional hospitals parceling smaller batches out to local clinics. Moderna’s vaccine comes in smaller packages of 100. But the real problem may be staffing. Solo providers at small clinics still need to care for the sick. Many are already seeking help from retired healthcare workers and medical school volunteers.

## When Will It Be Over?

A phone-based app developed by the CDC called “V-Safe” will track the health of the first 20 million vaccinated. But Operation Warp Speed Chief Advisor Moncef Slaoui says the “herd immunity” needed to eliminate COVID-19 will require 70 per cent of Americans to be immunized.

## What Next?

Because order of distribution will vary from state to state and county to county, RH operators wanting to know where they stand should consult both state and county healthcare agencies. RH operators would be wise also to engage now with the physician or clinic most likely to administer the vaccine. Being on the same page could make things go more smoothly when it's time to have staff and clients protected.

## Helpful Tools

Because rates of vaccination are historically lower in rural America, it's important to build confidence within your facility by discussing and promoting the importance, effectiveness, and safety of the vaccine. The “Long-Term Care” Toolkit at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19> offers a variety of useful information and tools, including sample letters, posters, fact sheets, and stickers.

Make sure also to address staff questions and concerns in open, honest discussions where you can gather input on how best to prepare for a successful administration of this critically important vaccine.