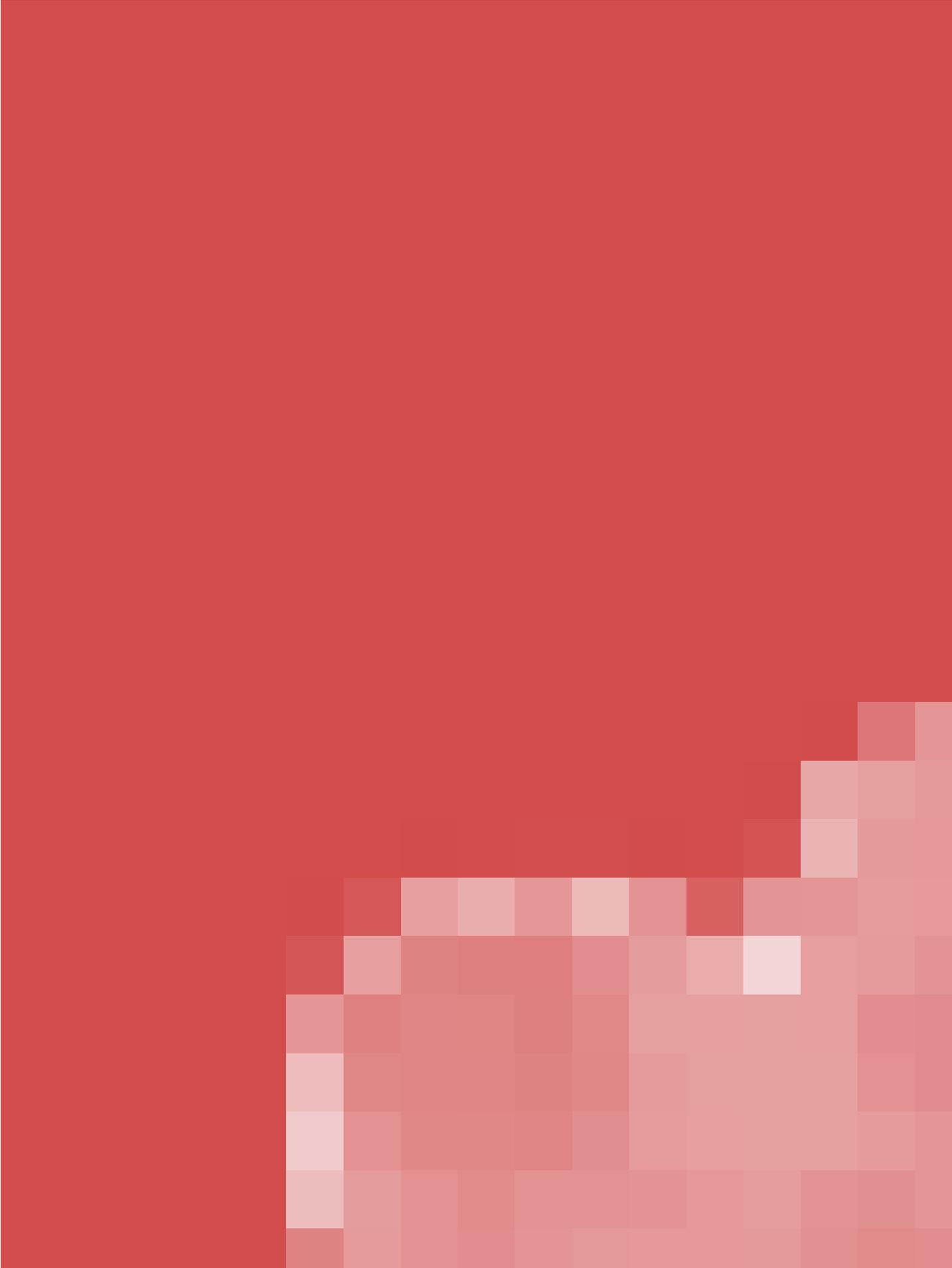


# 10 Secrets People in Recovery from Addiction Know that Could Help Us All Survive this Global Pandemic

People in recovery can teach us a lot about making it through tough times with strength and dignity. [Rams in Recovery](#) and [The Well](#) are collaborating to share some recovery wisdom we can borrow as we navigate our new reality.

## 1. The fight is fixed.

Wait, what? Is it really a central tenet of recovery to just give up and accept that things can't be changed? Well... yes. Many people recovering from addiction must accept that they cannot control their substance use once they start using. This allows them to move forward with a goal of ***not using*** at all.





Artwork by Emily Tompkins

We must take a deep breath and accept the reality of COVID-19 before we can navigate it. That we are quarantined, that we have lost a job, that we are anxious about our loved ones. We do this not out of defeat, but so that we can move forward and find ways to reach out to friends, file for unemployment, or challenge those in power to do better.

The Serenity Prayer, common in recovery meetings, says, “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Spiritual or not, we would all do well to live by the spirit of this quote.

## **2. H.A.L.T. if you're Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired.**

These four basic states affect life in a big way. They can be particularly challenging in combination. We've all been the “hangry version” of ourselves and it isn't pleasant for anyone. Checking in with yourself using HALT can be good preventative medicine. Do you really need to tell that person what you think? Right now?

These tips are the foundation of self-care. For those in recovery, paying attention to HALT can prevent dips in mood that prompt returns to drug use. For those weathering a pandemic, they'll help us keep it together so that we can be there for our friends and family. You can't pour from an empty cup, so take care of your own needs first.

### **3. Progress, not perfection.**

People *will* stumble early in recovery. Not everyone will relapse, but everyone will have emotional outbursts, make poor decisions, and feel overwhelmed at times. Those who succeed are those who keep trying anyway.

If you're in a funk from isolation, it's never too late to pick yourself up — even if that just means doing one small thing at a time to improve your well-being, like drinking a glass of water or calling a friend. Living with the new normal — heck, living in general — is a learning process for all of us, so don't hate on yourself for stumbling a little (or a lot).

### **4. “Serenity is not freedom from the storm but peace amid the storm.”**

People in recovery must learn to face life head-on without substances to numb them. They learn to exist alongside difficult

circumstances instead of running from them. While this brings sorrow, it also creates new capacity for joy.

No matter how long the current pandemic lasts, life will always have its challenges. Resilience in the face of inevitable hardship will serve us through the current situation and beyond. Check out the [APA's tips on building resilience](#).

## **5. Keep your head where your feet are.**

Those early in recovery often get caught up wondering how they'll make it. Things feel uncertain and they can't imagine going on for years in sobriety. They are encouraged to take things "one day at a time"—to remain in the present and deal with life's difficulties as they arise.

It's easy to worry about "what ifs" or how long the current situation will last. We're healthier and more productive when we bring our minds back to what's happening now. Instead of trying to predict what lies ahead, focus on "doing the next right thing," as is often said in recovery meetings. [Meditation](#) and [other forms of mindfulness](#) can help immensely.

## **6. Service transforms pain.**

Service to others is one of the most important pillars of addiction recovery. It transforms painful experiences into meaningful ones. Members of recovery groups are encouraged to pour their newfound knowledge and energy back into helping others who are struggling— so that the group can keep going, but also so that the individual never loses sight of their own goals.

The pain we are feeling right now is an opportunity to deepen our empathy. We benefit when we reach out to those who are struggling, whether they are experiencing the same problems we are, or facing challenges we've been lucky to avoid. Unsure how to get started during the quarantine? Call up someone you know who might be having a hard time and ask them how they're doing.

## **7. Gratitude is an action word.**

Remembering what we still have and the ways in which we're fortunate can be [a great buffer against hardship](#). Those early in recovery sometimes struggle to break free of the assumption that "everything is awful." Listing things to be grateful for challenges that assumption and encourages perseverance.

Gratitude is an open hearted, feel-good emotion that can supersede fear and prevent catastrophizing. When we are grateful for what we have, it inspires us to pass it on. Want to get started? Write a letter to someone you appreciate. Send it. Try listing out

what you are grateful for. The benefits of gratitude accumulate over time, so try making it a regular practice!

## 8. It's about surviving, but it's also about thriving.

“We don't get into recovery to drop out of life, we get into recovery to get back into it.” While we are certainly focusing on survival in this moment, like many of us did during our early recovery years, we can also be laying the groundwork for a brighter future.

While it is easy to focus on what we cannot do (whether it is drink, or go visit friends), we also have opportunities to strengthen relationships, improve our meditation practices, exercise, and find other things that will set us up to thrive. And we can still focus on the big and small things we have now that make us happy.

## 9. It's mutual aid, not self-help.

There are many paths to recovery, but we *all* need community. Recovery Dharma, SMART Recovery, Life Ring, Celebrate Recovery, and 12 Step all have community as a central tenet. Addiction, like a pandemic, causes isolation and disconnection. In order to survive and grow, we need each other.

We're all #AloneTogether and we have to support one another. Stay in contact with friends and loved ones over the phone, video chat, or text. Check in on people you haven't heard from in awhile. Talk to someone you trust when you're feeling low. Human beings are social animals! We'll weather this isolation far better if we're... well, not too isolated.

## **10. Normal is just a setting on the dryer.**

Sitting in recovery meetings over many years teaches us there is no such thing as “normal,” though many of us have lost years of our lives trying to become it. It is easy to criticize our differences; to believe we are not \_\_\_\_\_ enough. Obsession with normalcy often prevents us from seeing what is beautiful or possible. Many of us find that when we embrace and acknowledge the parts of ourselves we were once ashamed of, we are able to grow.

Provided you're following CDC guidelines, there's no “right” way to do a pandemic. This is a totally new scenario for almost all of us. It's okay to be very anxious, or not anxious at all. It's okay to wear pajamas all day, do yoga at midnight, and eat pancakes for dinner. If you're keeping yourself and others safe and working (at any pace) toward your own wellbeing, you're doing great.