



THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENT IN ADDICTION TREATMENT AND RECOVERY



3	Introduction
4	How Environment Plays a Role in Developing an Addiction
6	The Treatment Environment
12	Improving Environments to Promote Recovery
14	The Family Environment
18	The Home Environment
22	The Work Environment
26	The Social Environment
30	Environment is Everything in Recovery



LONG-TERM RECOVERY DEPENDS ON
MAKING YOUR ENVIRONMENTS AS
HEALTHY AS POSSIBLE.

Your environment includes many influences that can affect the likelihood of developing an addiction or relapsing once you're in recovery, and it's an important factor in successful recovery from addiction. Environment refers to the conditions and circumstances that surround you at any given time. From the treatment environment to your family, home, work and social environments, long-term recovery depends on making these environments as healthy as possible.



HOW ENVIRONMENT PLAYS A ROLE IN DEVELOPING AN ADDICTION



Your environment accounts for about half of your risk for developing an addiction, with genetic factors accounting for the remaining 50 percent. Common environmental risks for addiction include:

- ◆ An unstable living environment
- ◆ Family dysfunction
- ◆ A history of trauma
- ◆ Peer pressure
- ◆ Stress and pressure at work or school
- ◆ An unsafe community

The same environmental factors that can lead to addiction also pose a major risk for relapse. A major focus of addiction treatment is addressing your various environments and making crucial changes that promote a life in recovery.

A group of people are sitting in a circle, engaged in a discussion or therapy session. The focus is on their hands and arms as they gesture while speaking. The background is softly blurred, showing more people in the circle. A dark teal overlay with white text is positioned in the lower right corner.

THE TREATMENT ENVIRONMENT

The National Institute on Drug Abuse points out that willpower and good intentions alone are rarely enough to end an addiction.¹ That's because addiction is a complex disease with a number of underlying causes that must be addressed in order to enjoy successful recovery. A high-quality treatment program is essential for overcoming an addiction, and the right treatment environment is paramount to success.

Treatment Settings

Perhaps the most important environmental consideration in treatment is the setting. Addiction treatment takes place in inpatient and outpatient settings. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, it's important to match an individual to the appropriate treatment setting, which will be the least restrictive environment that's the safest and most effective for that individual.² From the initial setting, individuals will move along a continuum of care that steps down as they demonstrate growth in recovery and no longer need the structure and services offered.

The continuum of treatment settings, from most to least restrictive, includes residential treatment, intensive outpatient treatment and outpatient treatment.





Residential treatment involves living at a treatment facility that provides around-the-clock support. Supervision is essential for people who lack the intrinsic motivation needed to recover, have a long history of substance abuse and addiction or have insufficient support at home and in the community. Residential programs range from intense and highly supervised long-term programs to less-intense and less-supervised sober living centers.

Intensive outpatient treatment allows participants to live at home while receiving treatment, which involves at least nine hours of therapy and other programming each week. This means they can continue working, attending school or taking care of the family. Treatment takes place for three to eight hours a day, five to seven days a week.

Outpatient treatment is less intense than intensive outpatient treatment, requiring less than nine hours a week of participation. Services include individual, group and family counseling sessions once or twice a week. Intensive outpatient and outpatient treatment programs work best for people who have intrinsic motivation to recover, a safe place to live and plenty of support at home and in the community.

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL STIMULATION, ALONG WITH ADDRESSING THE GENERAL LIFE CONDITIONS OF ADDICTED INDIVIDUALS, MAY BE KEY FACTORS IN TREATING ADDICTION.

Environmental Enrichment

Environmental enrichment stimulates brain function, enhances cognitive resilience and promotes successful recovery. An enriched environment is one that is stimulating, challenging and engaging. It offers social and physical activity and promotes exploration.

A recent study found that cocaine-addicted mice who lived in an enriched environment that included large cages, a running wheel, tunnels, toys and other stimulations reduced addiction-related behaviors in the animals. The study suggests that positive environments and environmental stimulation, along with addressing the general life conditions of addicted individuals, may be key factors in treating addiction.³

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration stresses that addressing the multiple needs of an individual—including legal, housing, educational, social and health issues—is essential for effectively treating an addiction. A holistic approach to treatment that promotes the health of mind, body and spirit is essential for the best possible outcome of treatment.⁴



A holistic approach to treatment will involve traditional and complementary therapies that address a range of issues from a variety of angles. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is the cornerstone of treatment, while complementary therapies like art or music therapy, yoga, meditation and outdoor therapy offer enriching environments and encounters that help individuals express difficult emotions, synthesize complex experiences and gain a higher level of self-awareness.



Special Populations

A safe and supportive treatment environment is crucial for successful outcomes. This is especially true for vulnerable populations like pregnant women, people with co-occurring mental illnesses and those who have a history of trauma, such as sexual abuse.

Specialized treatment programs for these and other populations will promote successful recovery by providing a treatment environment that addresses the particular issues these populations may have. For example, women who have a history of sexual abuse may do best in a female-only program, and people who have a history of trauma will likely enjoy more success in a trauma-informed treatment program.

**A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE TREATMENT
ENVIRONMENT IS CRUCIAL FOR
SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES.**



IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTS TO PROMOTE RECOVERY



Through a variety of therapies, treatment helps people who have an addiction identify self-destructive thought patterns and behaviors and learn to replace these with healthier ways of thinking and behaving. It also helps them develop an arsenal of skills and strategies to help them cope with cravings, stress and other important triggers for relapse.

Just as important is helping people in recovery change their environments to promote long-term success. During treatment, you'll evaluate your various environments and make important lifestyle changes that will help improve the ultimate outcome of treatment.

**DURING TREATMENT, YOU'LL EVALUATE
YOUR VARIOUS ENVIRONMENTS AND
MAKE IMPORTANT LIFESTYLE CHANGES
THAT WILL HELP IMPROVE THE ULTIMATE
OUTCOME OF TREATMENT.**



THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT



According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, addiction is a family disease.⁵ It stresses the family system to the breaking point, reducing the stability of the home, sabotaging family unity and causing physical and mental health problems.

As family members' normal routines are affected by the negative experiences that come with living with someone who has an addiction, stress levels increase and family members develop unhealthy ways of coping. They may deny or manipulate reality, and they may minimize the big issues while maximizing small things. Fear, anger and resentment may boil just below the surface, and the family system becomes dysfunctional. This is a major trigger for relapse.

Improving the family environment is another major focus in treatment. An addicted family member quitting drugs or alcohol won't change the unhealthy thought and behavior patterns the other members of the family have developed in response to the addiction. These may include:

Codependent behaviors, in which a family member places the needs of others over their own needs and will do almost anything to keep a relationship alive, even if it's toxic and unhealthy. Signs of codependency include trying to fix others' problems, overblown emotional reactions, and a high level of guilt and perfectionism.

Enabling behaviors, in which a family member implicitly accepts the addiction and lets it continue with few consequences. Signs of enabling include ignoring unacceptable behaviors, prioritizing the needs of the addicted family member, lying to cover up negative behaviors and removing negative consequences, such as bailing the family member out of jail or giving them money to pay bills.

Unhealthy coping behaviors such as excessive shopping, compulsive Internet use, overeating or abusing drugs or alcohol have the potential to become addictive. Addressing these issues is central to successful recovery for the addicted individual and their family members. Family therapy and psychoeducational workshops are integral components of a high-quality treatment program. Individual therapy for family members and participation in a support group are also essential for the best possible outcome.

Family therapy during treatment helps to identify and address problems to repair damaged relationships, improve communication among family members and restore function to the family system.





Psychoeducational workshops help family members understand their loved one's addiction and learn how to best support them in recovery.

Individual therapy for family members includes minors, who are at a fourfold risk of developing a substance use disorder, and examines unhealthy behaviors they've developed and helps them learn how to think and behave in healthier ways.

Support groups offer family members a safe place to vent and a supportive community that shares stories, offers tips and resources, provides emotional support and celebrates milestones.



THE HOME ENVIRONMENT



Self-care is an important factor in successful recovery, and the home environment is where most self-care takes place. The home should be a refuge, a place where you can relax and find solace and comfort. For those transitioning out of an inpatient treatment program who don't have a safe, supportive and sober place to live, a sober living facility offers drug-free community living where individuals can continue to develop healthy relationships and lifestyle habits.

For those entering recovery through an outpatient program, making the home a safe haven that's conducive to ongoing recovery should be a priority at the outset, and it will likely require important lifestyle changes.

The Clutter-Free Home

A cluttered house can make you feel stressed, anxious and depressed. De-clutter your home by getting rid of things you don't love or need. Find a place for everything, and keep everything in its place.

**SELF-CARE IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN
SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY.**

**ADEQUATE SLEEP IS ANOTHER
EXTREMELY IMPORTANT ASPECT
OF SELF-CARE IN RECOVERY.**

The Well-Stocked Kitchen

Eating a healthy diet is very important in recovery. Nutritious food improves your physical and mental health and makes you feel stronger in recovery. Keep your kitchen stocked with wholesome snacks and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Strive to buy mostly whole foods at the store, including lean meats, fish, whole grains and beans. Plan your meals before you go grocery shopping, and avoid buying unhealthy packaged foods as much as possible.

The Sleep-Inducing Bedroom

Adequate sleep is another extremely important aspect of self-care in recovery. Sleep problems in early recovery can cause symptoms of depression, moodiness, low energy and anxiety, and a lack of sleep can lead to relapse. You need seven to nine hours of sleep each night for optimum health and functioning, and yet insomnia and other sleep difficulties are common in early recovery.

Make your bedroom a haven to promote better sleep. Keep it tidy, and install blackout curtains to make it as dark as possible. Make sure your pillow and mattress are comfortable, and keep the temperature of the room between 60 and 67 degrees while you sleep. If noise is a problem at night, use a white noise machine to help cancel it out. A sleep mask and earplugs may help you sleep by keeping light and noise out.



The Organized Home Office

Financial stress is an important trigger for relapse, and staying on top of your bills and other financial responsibilities will help keep anxiety and stress at bay. Whether your home office is a room in your home or a desk set up in the kitchen, keeping it organized is essential for keeping your finances in order. Create a spreadsheet or calendar to help you pay your bills on time.

The Drug-Free Home

Keeping your home free of drugs and alcohol is crucial during recovery. If anyone else in your home uses drugs or alcohol, ask them to keep it out of the house. You will likely be working to combat cravings for some time, and these and other triggers can put your recovery at risk. The harder it is to get drugs and alcohol, the better your chances of avoiding a relapse.



THE WORK ENVIRONMENT



Having a job in recovery promotes self-sufficiency, stability and higher self-esteem, and it fills the time with productive pursuits. But working in recovery can be challenging, whether you continue working at the same place or find a new job.

Conflicts with people in the office, job-related pressure and stress and workplace burn-out are triggers for relapse. You may have co-workers with whom you used to drink, or you may have feelings of guilt related to poor performance on the job while you were using drugs or alcohol. These can make the workplace awkward early on, and making your workplace environment conducive to ongoing recovery is important for continued sobriety.

Communicate Openly

Be honest with your boss and co-workers about your recovery. You needn't go into details about your past use, but let them know where you are now. This can open the door to a high level of support in the workplace. If you have co-workers you used to use with, make it clear that you can no longer hang out after work. If your company has events where alcohol use is central, let them know you won't be able to attend, or have a plan in place to avoid using if attendance is required.

Reduce Stress

Stress at work can throw a wrench in your recovery, and reducing stress in the workplace is important in early recovery. Whenever you feel stress, take a break if possible and walk around the block or do some deep breathing exercises. Avoid caffeine, which can make you feel anxious and jittery, and keep healthy snacks on hand to fuel your brain and body to help reduce stress. If possible, leave work to attend a support group meeting when workplace stress overwhelms you, or draw on your support system at work or at home to help you calm down.

Stay Organized

Keeping your focus on your job while you're at work will help keep your mind busy. Make an effort to stay organized and on schedule so that you can minimize stress and do your best work, which will promote higher self-esteem and self-confidence.





Handle Conflicts Calmly and Professionally

If you have co-workers you don't get along with or who subtly try to sabotage your recovery, make it a point to stay calm and professional. When negative emotions run high, it can cause problems for your recovery. Walk away if you have to until you feel calm and able to handle the situation. Examine your behaviors to determine if there's anything you can do to ease the conflict, and try to see things from others' perspectives to help you better understand it.



THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

**A HEALTHY SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
WILL GO A LONG WAY TOWARD
HELPING YOU ACHIEVE LONG-TERM
SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY.**

Your Social Environment

Your social environment consists of your friends and peers in recovery, the places you go and the things you do. A 2006 journal article stresses that your social network is essential in recovery because it helps reduce stress directly and indirectly during difficult times.⁶ A social network offers emotional support and a sense of belonging that improves your life satisfaction and even increases your health, happiness and longevity. A healthy social environment will go a long way toward helping you achieve long-term successful recovery.

Surround Yourself with Support

One of the most difficult things in recovery is letting go of toxic friendships and relationships with the people you used to use with and forging new friendships that are healthy and supportive. But doing so is critical for ongoing abstinence. Surround yourself with people who understand your needs in recovery and who encourage you in your sobriety.

Go to Meetings

Attending daily meetings should be part of your daily routine. Meetings keep you accountable, offer a high level of support and provide social interaction and the opportunity to develop friendships with others in recovery. They help you stay focused on your recovery, and they promote personal growth and a higher level of self-awareness.



Find Ways to Have Fun

An important focus in treatment is helping individuals find ways to enjoy life without drugs or alcohol. Engaging in a hobby is a good way to fill your time with productive and enjoyable activities, and it offers the opportunity to meet other people and forge healthy friendships. Whether you're creative, athletic, artistic or musical, finding activities you can enjoy sober is an important consideration for ongoing recovery.



Make Time for Yourself

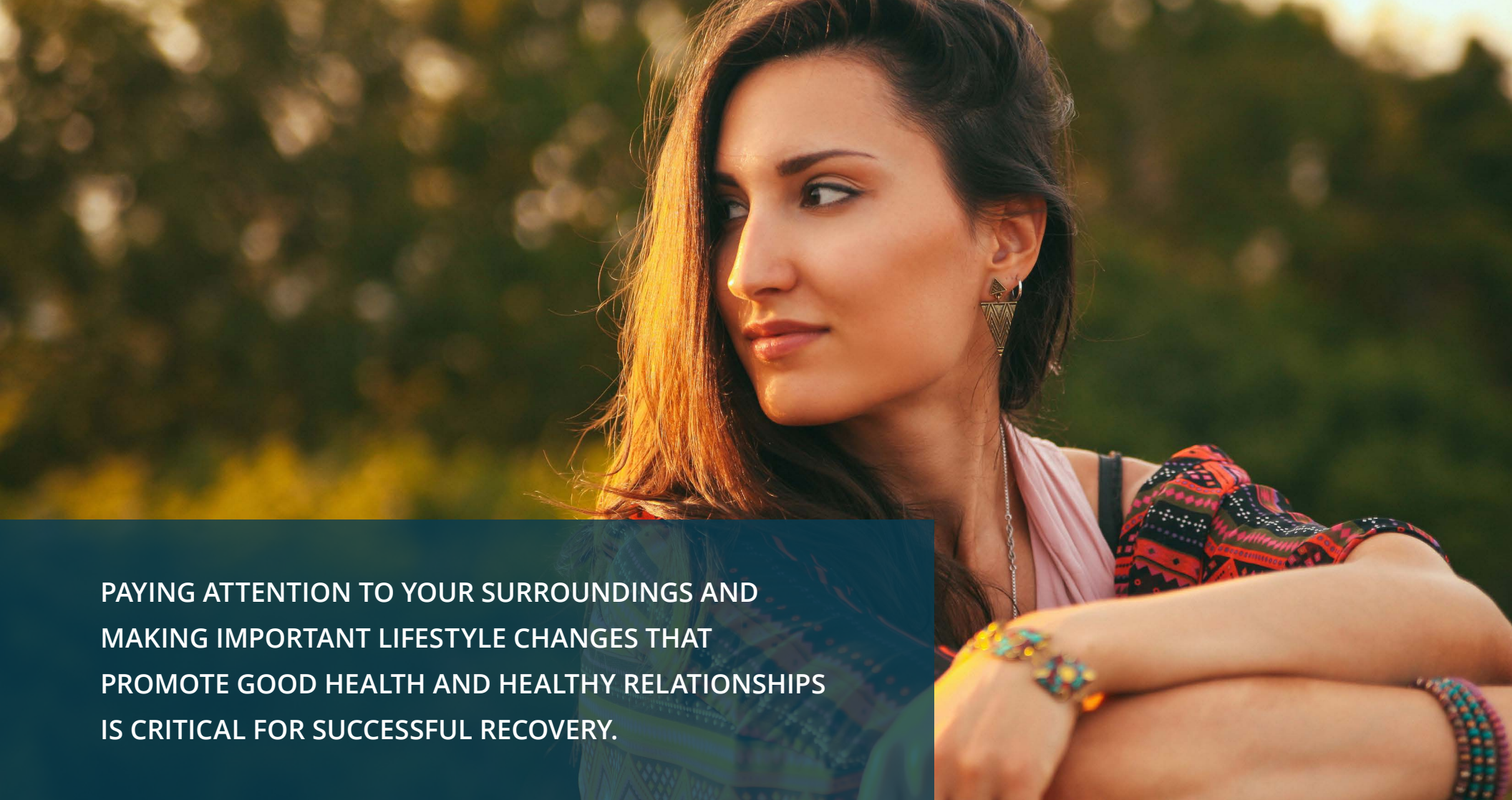
Keep room in your schedule for important alone-time so that you can relax, reflect and rejuvenate. Filling your social calendar too full can lead to fatigue, and it can distract you from important tasks of recovery, such as good nutrition, adequate sleep and stress relief.

Have a Plan for High-Risk Social Situations

High-risk situations are those that may trigger a desire to use drugs or alcohol. These may include being at a gathering where alcohol is served or drugs are being used or finding yourself in close proximity to people you used with or places where you used. Having a plan in place in the event you find yourself in a high-risk situation is important for staving off a lapse or relapse. Always have an out, and have a friend or sponsor you can call for support any time—and make that call when you need to.

A close-up, low-angle shot of a young Black man with a short beard, smiling broadly and looking upwards towards a bright, hazy sky. He is wearing a light-colored, horizontally striped shirt. The background is a soft-focus mix of green foliage and a bright, overexposed sky, creating a warm and hopeful atmosphere.

**ENVIRONMENT IS
EVERYTHING**
IN RECOVERY



**PAYING ATTENTION TO YOUR SURROUNDINGS AND
MAKING IMPORTANT LIFESTYLE CHANGES THAT
PROMOTE GOOD HEALTH AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS
IS CRITICAL FOR SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY.**

The various environments you find yourself in can make or break your recovery. Paying attention to your surroundings and making important lifestyle changes that promote good physical and mental health and healthy relationships is critical for successful recovery. During treatment, you'll explore a variety of ways to improve your family, work, social and home environments, and acting on these can help you maintain successful recovery for the long-term.

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Located in beautiful rural Pennsylvania, Silvermist offers individualized treatment for substance use and mental health disorders. Silvermist sets the standard for addiction treatment on the East Coast by providing men and women a beautiful and discreet environment filled with all the amenities that support early recovery. Silvermist is grounded in the highest clinical standards and is committed to clinical integrity, community and education.

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