



Recovery Notes

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Scientific Recovery

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For Problems with Alcohol

OUTPATIENT TREATMENT FOR HIGH-PROFILE WOMEN

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Dual Diagnosis and Dual Recovery

Overcoming alcohol problems while concurrently addressing depression or anxiety.

When a woman has both an alcohol problem and a mental health issue, such as depression or anxiety, it is called *dual diagnosis* or *co-occurring disorders* or double trouble. Dealing with alcoholism is never easy, and it is even more difficult for a woman who is also struggling with mental health problems. But, there are treatments that can help. With proper treatment and support these women can overcome alcoholism, get their symptoms of depression or anxiety under control, and reclaim their lives.

Most women with alcohol problems have a co-occurring emotional disorder. Many have several. Both the mental health problems and the alcohol problems have their own unique symptoms that can get in the way of a woman's ability to function effectively, to handle life's difficulties, and to relate comfortably to others. Complicating the situation, the two problems affect each other and interact. When a mental health problem goes untreated, the alcohol prob-

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lem usually gets worse as well. And, when alcohol problems increase, mental health problems usually increase too.

DUAL DIAGNOSIS – AN IMPORTANT IDEA

Why is dual diagnosis an important idea? The reason is this: If a woman gets help with her emotional problems, she is more likely to succeed in alcohol recovery. This is called dual recovery—working on both the alcohol addiction and the emotional problems at the same time. The old way, still heard in some treatment programs, is that a woman must get sober first, and then work on her emotional problems. The new view is that working on both at the same time, from early in treatment, is likely to be more helpful. It is now a widely recommended treatment approach.

For example, if a woman is depressed, she may need therapy and/or medication to relieve her depression—which, in turn, can

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help her to control her drinking. Here, the emotional problem usually arises first, and the problem drinking second—a pattern suggesting *self-medication* or using a substance to cope with difficult emotions.

Many women go through their entire lives with an emotional problem that is never identified. They may genuinely work hard on their drinking problems, but repeatedly

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fail to achieve stable sobriety. When their emotional problems flare up, they are back in the addictive cycle — drinking to feel better, then feeling worse, drinking more, and so on. They often wonder why others can recover, but they themselves cannot. These women suffer immensely with low self-esteem and years of pain.

DUAL RECOVERY

Whether mental health problems or alcohol abuse came first, recovery depends on treating *both* illnesses. Dual recovery means working on *both* the alcohol problem and the emotional disorder *at the same time*.

For any specific woman, dual recovery might mean getting a medication to relieve anxiety, while also doing other alcohol

recovery work. It might involve exploring how her alcohol problems and emotional issues are linked—how they arose over time, why they go together, and how her alcohol use may have been an attempt to cope with particular stressors.

There is hope. Recovering from dual disorders takes time, commitment, and courage. It may take months or even years. But women with alcohol problems and mental health problems *can* and *do* get better.

Combined treatment is best. The best chance of recovery is through integrated treatment for both the alcohol problem and the mental health problem. This means getting combined mental health and addiction treatment from the same treatment provider or team.

Alcohol abuse can induce mental health problems. Some women find that as they stop drinking alcohol, they feel less depressed, anxious, or angry. This is one of the really positive sides of recovery. The challenging part is that while a woman is drinking or withdrawing from alcohol use, it may look like she has a co-occurring disorder (e.g., depression), but it disappears when she achieves stable sobriety. This means that she did not have a real co-occurring disorder. What looked like a co-occurring disorder was actually caused by the alcohol, and goes away when the alcohol use goes away.

Co-Occurring disorders do not go away with abstinence from alcohol. A true co-occurring disorder will not go away with abstinence. It needs direct attention and help through therapy and/or medication.

Taking a psychiatric medication is not substance use. Sometimes women hear that taking a psychiatric medication, such as an antidepressant or anti-anxiety drug,

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is the same as using alcohol. This is not true. Taking a psychiatric medication as prescribed, under the supervision of a physician who understands her history, is an important part of recovery for many women with emotional problems.

Relapses are part of the recovery process. Women should not get too discouraged if they relapse. Slips and setbacks happen. But, with hard work, most women can recover from their relapses and move on with recovery.

Peer support can help. Many women benefit from joining a self-help support group of peers like Alcoholics Anonymous groups. These groups of like-minded women give a woman with alcohol problems a chance to lean on others who know first hand what she is going through and an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others who have been successful.

SOME ENCOURAGEMENT

There is hope in recognizing one's emotional problems. It enables a woman to move forward. One of the most difficult parts of alcohol addiction is feeling as though it's "all your own fault." With co-occurring disorders, it is possible to recognize that the problem is more complicated — that more help is needed than addiction treatment or AA alone.

Scientific Recovery

Scientific Recovery is an evidence-based treatment program for women seeking state-of-the-art, individual therapy for problem drinking. Our focus is on professional women who have recognized that alcohol is a problem they no longer want in their lives. Our goal is to assist women not only to eliminate their alcohol dependence, but also to be happy that they did.



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