Finding Healthy Alternatives: Coping Strategies Beyond Self-Medication in Addiction Treatment

by Louisville Addiction Treatment Center | Jul 27, 2023

Addiction can be a challenging and isolating struggle, but it is important to remember that you are not alone. If you are seeking addiction treatment in Louisville, Kentucky, there is hope.

People handle distressing emotions in different ways. While some choose healthy coping mechanisms, some turn to drugs or alcohol to cope. This is referred to as self-medication.

Self-medication is common in individuals struggling with a dual diagnosis i.e. when someone has both a mental health disorder and substance abuse problem. In these cases, individuals self-medicate to mask the symptoms of mental health issues. However, people don't have to have a diagnosis to self-medicate. Others do it to get relief from sadness, anxiety, grief, trauma and other stresses of everyday life.

Regardless of the reasons why it's done, self-medicating can lead to serious physical and psychological issues. Left unchecked, using drugs to cope with unpleasant emotions can lead to dependency and addiction. Additionally, it may also worsen mental health issues and symptoms while increasing the risk of harm from different substance interactions e.g. mixing alcohol with opioids increases the likelihood of overdosing.

Healthy Alternatives to Self-Medication

Given the dangers of self-medicating, it's crucial to find other ways of coping with stressful or unpleasant situations and emotions.

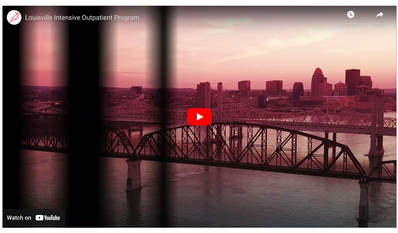
Here are some coping strategies that can be incorporated into addiction treatment:

- **Counseling and therapy.** Integrated treatment that simultaneously treats substance abuse and mental health disorders gives the best chance of overcoming self-medication. During therapy sessions, you'll examine the underlying reasons why you self-medicate and then learn the coping skills necessary to deal with them.
- **Practicing mindfulness and meditation.** Practicing mindfulness is a great way to prevent you from spiraling by keeping you grounded in the present. It's also an excellent way to be aware of your thoughts and regular meditation can help manage stress and reduce impulsiveness.
- **Nurturing a support network.** Surrounding yourself with people who share the same experience e.g. attending Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings will provide encouragement, support and motivation.
- **Finding creative outlets.** You can also complement addiction treatment by exploring different creative outlets for your stress and emotions. You can blow off steam through dancing, writing, cooking, working out, painting, etc. These activities also keep your mind occupied and away from cravings and temptations.
- **Learning stress management techniques.** Yoga, deep breathing, muscle relaxation, journaling and walking are some of the ways you can manage stress without resorting to self-medication.
- **Making healthy lifestyle choices.** Being healthy goes a long way toward complementing treatment. That's why it's crucial to develop healthy habits that improve your life such as regular exercising, eating nutritious meals and getting enough sleep.

Getting Help for Self-Medication

Self-medication may appear to work in the short term but can have adverse long-term effects on an individual. Don't let this happen to you.

With guidance, support, and treatment from Impact Outpatient Program, you can learn to manage your stressors and triggers without reaching for alcohol or drugs. We offer judgment-free care and individualized treatment plans to help our clients overcome addiction. In addition to outpatient and intensive outpatient treatment, we also offer telemedicine services giving clients the option of virtual therapy sessions. Reach out to us today to build a life beyond addiction.



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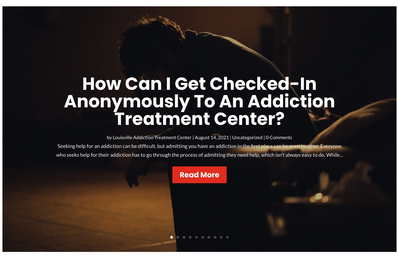

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