

# *Staying Off Crystal*



*You CAN do it!*

Practical advice from gay and bisexual men

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# Deciding to quit crystal is a huge step. Congratulations!

**And if the next steps feel really hard or scary, that's OK. Keep reading!**

This booklet contains thoughts and advice from many gay and bisexual men who have walked this same path before...or still walk it. We don't claim to be role models for perfect recovery. We've made some mistakes, and we don't have all the answers. But we do offer hope and a belief that **you can make it!**

The most important thing to remember is that **you are not alone**. There's a whole community of men who understand what you're going through. Help and support are out there! We hope you find both in this booklet.

## Recovery Fears

I'll be boring.....  
I'll lose my friends if I tell them about my use.....  
I'll gain weight.....  
I'll never have sex again.....  
I don't think I can make it.....

## Reality Check

You'll be real.  
If you haven't lost them yet, they already know.  
You didn't look that pretty strung out.  
You'll never have cold, degrading sex again.  
Neither did those of us in recovery now.

## What to Expect

Once you stop using crystal, you will likely go through very distinct stages. Almost everyone who quits crystal goes through them. Each stage is described on the following pages. You'll see that each stage has its own challenges, rewards, and advice for handling both.

You may find it helpful to mark these stages on a calendar. *(Yes, the time frames can be that predictable!)* That way you can watch your progress and prepare for what lies ahead!

## What to Expect: 0 - 2 Weeks

You feel crazy as your body and brain re-learn how to work without meth.

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### What's tough

- Need to eat and sleep a lot. Hard to set a pattern.
- Raw, swinging emotions: fear, anger, depression, hopelessness.
- May still hear voices.
- No energy or motivation. Hard to follow through on anything.
- Grieving, sense of loss.

### What's good

- The repair begins!
- Slowly getting in touch with reality.

### ADVICE

Sleep and eat as much healthy food as you want.

Keep your goals small.

Lay low and ride it out.

It will get better!

You have a lot of strengths to draw from your addiction.  
Whatever helped you survive crystal can help you  
succeed in recovery too.

## What to Expect: 1 Month

Handling day-to-day life again.

### What's tough

- Cravings can be intense.
- Changes in how body looks and feels. Weight gain.
- Frustration about how long it can take to get services or treatment.
- Sexual urges resurface.

### What's good

- Cravings do ease up.
- Clarity!
- *Wow, you look so much better!*
- Feeling healthier. Your "natural energy" coming back.
- Getting support where you don't expect it.

### ADVICE

Keep busy. Build a routine.

Start telling others you've stopped using. They may not judge you as badly as you judge yourself.

Limit situations that could make you feel really good or really bad.

Let go of feeling fat. Buy new pants and move on.

Look at what you have achieved so far.

Write down some goals on paper — try it!



*Seek support from friends, family and recovery groups. Trying to do it alone just makes it that much harder.*

Jordan, 40  
brother and son

Telling others about your addiction or recovery is like coming out of the closet again. It's hard to do, but it lifts the burden.

## What to Expect: 1 - 3 Months

Cleaning up the damage and feeling “normal” again.

### What’s tough

- Sexual urges.
- Cravings can still be frustrating.
- Shame, sense of personal failure.
- Too much or too little to do.
- Loneliness.

### What’s good

- Briefer and less intense cravings. More confidence to handle them.
- Jobs, housing, money coming together.
- Seeing more success. *I can do this.*
- Trust in self and others replaces paranoia.
- Re-connecting with friends, family.
- Getting more hooked into support groups.



*Take your time. There’s no one way to do this. Find what works for you and work it.*

Jason F., 27  
ex-offender

### ADVICE

It’s easy to get over-ambitious. Pace yourself.

Connect with other people even if you don’t want to.

Be clear about what you need from people and what you can give. It’s OK to have really firm rules at first.

Talk about your feelings.

Sex can wait if it triggers you.

Don’t focus too much on where you think you “should” be.

When you feel triggered, talk about it.

## What to Expect: 3 Months

Thrill of recovery hits “The Wall.”

### What's tough

- Recovery and life get boring!
- New joys slow down.
- Depression, feeling alone.
- Realizing what you lost or did to your loved ones.
- Feeling like nothing has changed in your life.
- Unexpected triggers (running into dealer, finding an old baggy, etc.)

### What's good

- Feeling confident.
- Self-forgiveness.
- The feel and comfort of meaningful, supportive relationships.

### ADVICE

#### Danger of relapse really peaks here!

2 big pitfalls: feeling too confident that you're fixed or too discouraged that you aren't.

Don't get cocky — you're not out of the woods no matter how strong you feel.

If you feel “it's not working for me,” hang in. It's working.

The key is to ramp up your recovery, physical and social activities.

Ask about medication for depression or anxiety if you need to.

If you lose faith, think about your worst day on speed.

## What to Expect: 4 - 6 Months

A “new you” starts to replace the “old you.”

### What's tough

- Feeling emotions, often in big swings.
- Confusion about what's next in life and relationships.
- Boredom.
- Seeing potential payoffs but feeling depressed if they seem far away.

### What's good

- Feeling less shame, more self-forgiveness.
- Connecting more, taking more proactive steps.
- Feeling more productive.
- Dealing with your *real* issues.

### ADVICE

Mix-up your recovery routine with new meetings or groups.

Consider the role of other drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes in your life.

Get into an exercise routine.

Take a fresh look at your triggers — they may be different now.

Start exploring the real reasons you were using crystal.

*It's a constant experience of self-discovery. Discovering things that are enriching and cutting out things that aren't can be an emotional experience. Emotions are a natural part of life, and I can deal with that.*



Waylon, 24  
aspiring musician

Celebrate your successes with something other than using.  
Getting high is the wrong reward!



## What to Expect: 6 - 12 Months

Life gets into a rhythm again. New paths begin to emerge.

### What's tough

- Feeling self-righteous or over-confident about your recovery.
- Urge to slack off because you feel good or no longer remember the bad.
- Resentment that others don't have the same or as many challenges as you.
- Disappointment that you don't have every thing you thought you would by now.
- What worked before might no longer work as well.

### What's good

- Handling challenges with honesty and integrity.
- Making plans for the future. Actually following through!
- Getting to know who you really are and liking what you find.
- Really satisfying relationships.
- Important rewards (family, friends, housing, career).
- Discovering new interests.



*Have patience with yourself and other people. This is the most critical part of recovery.*

*Getting away from instant gratification really does pay off. Give up being perfect and invincible.*

Gary Jenohn Thogersen, 58  
retired lawyer

### ADVICE

Balance your life with more non-recovery activities and hobbies.

Vary your recovery routine.

Always stay tuned in to your feelings and express them.

Keep working on yourself. Take care of health issues caused by your use (like your teeth).

Guard your recovery jealously. It's a precious thing to make it so far!

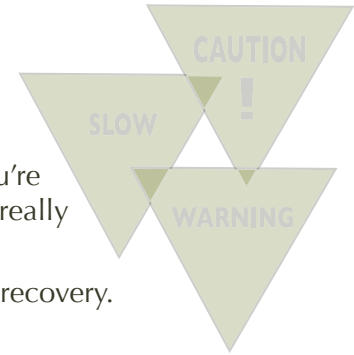
## What about Sex?

**You can have great sex after crystal!** — even if you worry that sex will never be the same. And be glad it won't! Sex may have been hot and wild at first, but it probably became mechanical, disconnected, painful, dehydrated, and impotent. Most guys are happy to leave that part behind.

### How to reclaim your sex life without crystal:

#### At first:

- **Chat rooms, websites, and bathhouses can be slippery.** If you're going there, why are you — *honestly?* Is it for sex or are you really looking for drugs?
- **Think twice before dating or fucking guys** you meet in early recovery. Emotions can be raw, volatile, and skewed.
- **Find less risky ways** to take care of your sexual urges. Play it safe.
- **Trust that you WILL have sex again.** Most men do. *Are you throwing a pity party about sex as an excuse to get high?*



#### Before sex starts again:



- **Get to know your sexual self again** — maybe you've changed or just got lost in speed. *What turns you on now? What satisfied you before crystal?*
- **Rethink your values about sex.** *What do you really want from relationships and sex?*
- **Trust your gut** about when it feels OK to start having sex again. If you can't even jerk off without thinking about drugs, you might not be ready.
- **Get tested for STDs** — even if you don't feel or see symptoms. Get tested for HIV - even if you fear the results.
- **How will you handle safer sex?** How will you talk about HIV status or condoms? What will you do to limit risks around HIV and STDs?

## When sex does happen:

- **The first few times can feel awkward and embarrassing.** You might feel self-conscious about your looks or worried how your body will function. Emotional connection or actually knowing someone before sex can help ease fear and anxiety.
- **Be prepared for how much you will actually feel** — physically and emotionally. Pleasure, pain, confusion, thrill, love...anything can happen without crystal to numb it.
- **Talk about how you feel with your partner.** Set limits on what feels safe for you. It's OK to stop if you feel freaked out. It's also OK to dive in if it feels good!

### **Good things about sex without speed:**

- A dick that works!
- Actually feeling and experiencing it.
- Not feeling shame about what you're doing.
- A sense of respect for yourself and the guy you're with.

Don't compare your recovery with anyone else's.  
Focus instead on who you are *now*, who you were *then*, and  
who you still want to *become*.

## When Both of You Quit: Advice for Couples

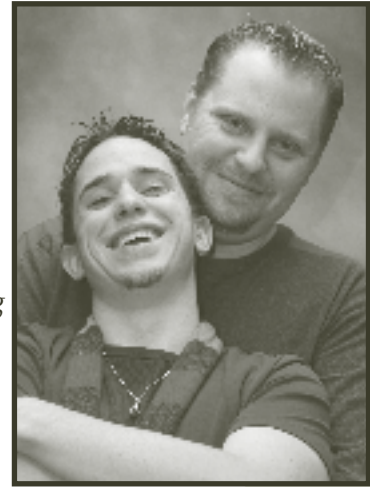
- **You can't get clean for the other person.** You have to do recovery because YOU want it. Using the other person as a motivator often builds into resentment.
- Many couples worry, *"Will we still like each other?"* **Don't let the fear of change keep you from moving forward.** If you take the risk of losing each other, you may actually find new reasons you want to stay together.
- **Go to separate treatment programs or counselors.** You each need your own time and space. Find a different counselor for any counseling you do as a couple.
- **Make a deal** to NOT talk about the bad things you did to each other while high. You can't undo them. You are different people now.
- **Be willing to say** to your partner, *"If you relapse, I have to step away from you."* You have to be able to disconnect.
- **Don't compare recoveries.** It's not a competition.



### Tips for rebuilding trust:

- **Actions become extremely important.** Follow through on what you say. If you don't think you can do something, don't say you can. Be honest.
- **Communicate about everything,** no matter how small. Remember how secrecy led to disaster before?
- **When feelings of mistrust creep in, deal with them** right away. Get your "hunch" out in the open before it evolves into a full-scale conspiracy plot!

*Couples in recovery are two people walking side by side. No one leads; no one follows. And sometimes the most loving thing is to let go if you need to.*



Robert, 22  
future chemical dependency counselor  
Josh, 32  
survivor of childhood sexual abuse

The relationship is only as strong as each person's recovery.  
You bring little to yourself or to the relationship when you're high.

## Special Advice for HIV-Positive Guys

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If you already had HIV — or you think you got HIV because of your use — the first step is to **forgive yourself**. You can't keep feeling guilty for exposing others to HIV. You can't keep blaming yourself for getting it.

Your body might take longer to get balanced again. You might **feel more tired**. That's frustrating when you're so ready for recovery, but your body isn't. Watch how that adds to depression.

**Make your health a #1 priority.** Don't dwell on the damage you caused your body with crystal. You're taking care of yourself now. That's what matters.

**Get a medical check-up** as soon as you can. Be honest with your doctor about everything.

**Hook up with a case manager.** Plug into services that can help.

### Watch for these relapse triggers:

- Side effects from HIV meds. Many guys are surprised when even small changes in how their bodies feel can make them think of crystal.
- Feeling discouraged if your health gets worse.
- Feeling like “letting loose” if your health really improves.

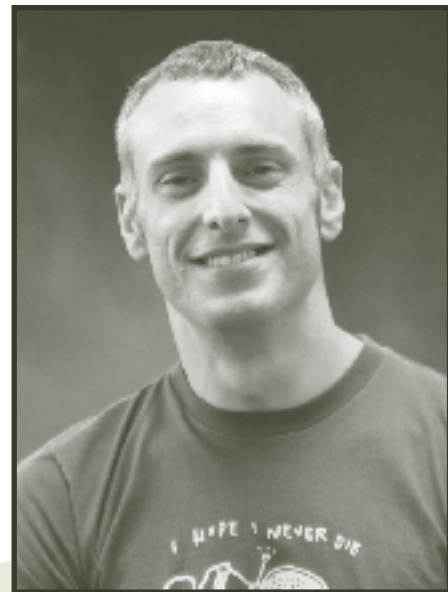
## Special Advice for Injectors

**First, you are not worse off because you shot speed.** You don't have to feel more shame. You are never too far gone.

Injectors **tend to isolate more** than other users. Worlds become very small, and it can be hard to be out in public. In recovery you may struggle to make connections. Start slow — one person at a time.

**Triggers are often more intense.** Injectors may miss the “ritual” of shooting almost as much as the high. When you start to feel that “rush” firing through your body, do anything to stop the thoughts. It can be hard to back pedal from that.

*I'm embarrassed to have been living under my potential. I had no idea that I would want goals in my life again or have interest in developing relationships. When I do relapse, this is what helps pull me out.*



Trenton Garris, 34  
animal shelter volunteer

## When Relapse Happens: Real Stories

*Everyone said, "Relapse is normal." So I used it as an excuse to relapse! But it is not normal to be insane on speed. Relapse may be common, but it's not a requirement.*

*Each time I relapse, I feel like I'm letting people down. I worry that my friends won't take me seriously or that they won't want to invest in a relationship with me because they can't trust I will make it. Then I start feeling worthless which makes me want to keep using. That's such a rough cycle to get caught in.*

*I relapsed so often that a friend asked me, "Are you just using recovery as a pit stop from using or to squeeze in a nap?" I didn't want to believe I was still so hooked into using. I really wanted to believe I was better than that. I had to get honest and humble.*

*As soon as you stop the relapse, you enter this void. You instantly shut out the using community, but you're too embarrassed to reconnect with your recovery friends. So there's frustration and loneliness. But you have to get honest with what happened ASAP. As soon as you let your circle know you've relapsed, you'll come out of the void. Don't isolate. Get back to your plan.*

*Relapse can really tear up your self-esteem. Because you had some clean time, you know what's positive and worthwhile on the other side. That sometimes helps pull you out. But other times you feel like a fuck-up because you had that good stuff and then blew it. You have to fight that hopelessness and stop beating yourself up.*

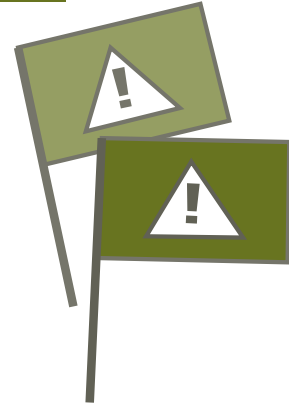


## Relapse Red Flags

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### Are you...

- Thinking more about how, when, where, and with whom you might get high again?
- Feeling really, really bored?
- Overdoing...anything? Too much work, exercise, time spent on-line, etc.?
- Making excuses to skip groups or meetings?
- Lying to yourself or others? Being secretive?
- Using other drugs or drinking more?
- Believing your problem is completely fixed?
- Isolating?
- Obsessing about weight or quick ways to lose it?
- Obsessing about sex or quick ways to get it?



If you think you're in trouble, look on pages 2 - 7 for some great advice!

### ***“Don't meth users relapse more than other addicts?”***

NO! There's nothing about crystal that makes it harder to quit than other drugs. Data from treatment centers show that meth users are just as successful as others in recovery.

Don't buy into this myth.

## Resources

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Seattle Counseling Service: 206-323-1768 [www.seattlecounseling.org](http://www.seattlecounseling.org)  
Adult and youth treatment

Project NEON: 206-323-1768 [www.crystalneon.org](http://www.crystalneon.org)  
Free 1:1 counseling, support groups, health info for crystal users

### Support Groups

**Schedules updated regularly on [www.homohealth.org](http://www.homohealth.org)**

Strength Over Speed (SOS)

Mondays 2 pm, 303 17th Ave E (at Thomas)

Thursdays 2 pm, Harborview, 5th floor, West Wing Room 116

Saturdays 7 pm, Lifelong AIDS Alliance (lower parking lot door) 1002 E. Seneca

Crystal Clear (NEON/SOS)

Tuesdays 6 pm, Seattle Counseling Service, 1216 Pine Street (at Melrose)

Capitol Hill Alano Club: 206-860-9560 [www.capitolhillalanoclub.org](http://www.capitolhillalanoclub.org)

Daily 12-step meetings for lgbt, 1900 E. Madison (at 19th)

Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA): [www.xtwkrs.org](http://www.xtwkrs.org) [www.crystalmeth.org](http://www.crystalmeth.org)

Wednesdays 8 pm, Alano Club, 1900 E. Madison

Fridays 8 pm, 303 17th Ave E (at Thomas)

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA): 206-587-2838 [www.seattleaa.org](http://www.seattleaa.org)

Narcotics Anonymous (NA): 206-790-8888 [www.seattlena.org](http://www.seattlena.org)

### Phone Info

24-Hour Crisis Line: 206-461-3222 or 1-866-4CRISIS

Alcohol/Drug 24-Hour Help Line: 206-722-3700 or 1-800-562-1240 [www.adhl.org](http://www.adhl.org)

HIV/STD Hotline: 206-205-7837

The HIV/AIDS Program at Public Health - Seattle & King County  
would like to thank the men from  
Strength Over Speed  
and others who contributed anonymously to this project.  
Your courage, wisdom, and honesty  
are a compassionate gift  
to others who still struggle with crystal meth.



Photography by Joe Staiano

Alternative formats available