

Tool:

A means by which something is done or obtained.

Have you ever tried to fix or adjust something without the proper tool? It makes your work much harder. The following is a list of "tools" for a clean and sober life. These should not be construed as a mandatory set of rules, but rather as a list of suggestions.

Every tool included in this "toolbox" is taken from the personal toolbox of an addicted person in recovery. You may find them all helpful, or just a few, or possibly none at all. The point is to provide the person who is new to recovery, or who is struggling with it, with a concrete list of suggestions that they can pick and choose from.

This list is by no means comprehensive or exclusive. Our hope is that you will use it as a starting point, and that you will add tools of your own design at whichever point you find conducive to your recovery.

Maintaining life-long abstinence from all non-medically indicated mood-altering substances is the goal of LifeRing Secular Recovery members. We hope that these tools will aid you in reaching that goal for yourself. ~ John M. Price ⁱⁱⁱ

Awesome and Anonymous

1. [LifeRing chats](#) (especially for urgent drinking urges)
2. [LifeRing email lists](#) (read daily as a "daily do" for maintenance)
3. [LifeRing forum on Delphi](#) (reminds me of how it was in beginning)
4. [Recovery by Choice Workbook](#) (especially preventing relapse section)
5. Doing a web search for internet cafes before taking trip.
6. Taking a non-drinking support person with me to activities.
7. Telling myself this is like an earthquake and will be over soon.
8. Taking a tiny stuffed "sobriety support" teddy bear with me.

-Contributed by Anonymous

It's Your Way or the Highway

I cannot tell anyone else how to get sober. I can only tell you what worked to get ME sober. Something I repeat often in [LifeRing meetings](#)! I try to explain the idea that recovery is about finding out what works for you and that our meetings are about exchanging tools and ideas – we have no 'hard and fast rules' as there simply is no such thing as a 'program' that works for everyone.

-Contributed by Jill T.

No Matter What

1. Seriousness – This is nothing less than sober life versus using death.
2. Information – Retrain your brain. Stimulate your mind with substance abuse related education. Books, audiotapes, videos or DVD's; pamphlets and meetings; television and radio, newspaper and magazine articles are all good sources of info. The more you learn about what substances do to your body and mind, the less likely you are to abandon abstinence.
3. People – Human contact and relationships can be a powerful motivator. Interaction (especially with fellow sobrietists) fights the old pattern of isolation.
4. Honesty – A valuable tool. It is much harder to deceive your friends and loved ones and relapse after they have learned the true extent of your substance abuse. Life can be dealt with reasonably when the light of truth is shined upon it.
5. Listening – Not only to people with long-term sobriety, but also to your own inner sober voice.
6. Taking notes – Anytime, but especially in early sobriety when memory can be a problem.
7. Share your history - It is surprisingly therapeutic when done honestly.
8. Openness - Try not to reject ideas without considering them.
9. Exercise - Good health is a great way to combat temptation.

10. Do It Now - Procrastination is an anti-tool that works against developing good self-esteem.

11. Credit Yourself – You are staying sober; you deserve the praise. Others may have helped, but you are maintaining the “Sobriety Priority”.

-Contributed by Larry B.

5 Terrific Tips for the Sober Life

1. Stay away from parties in early sobriety. It does not have to be permanent, but make it easier for yourself until you are firmly in control of your sobriety.

2. Remember your hangovers, arrests, drug overdoses. Keep these memories fresh and do not allow yourself to romanticize the “good old days”.

3. Know that alcohol does not help insomnia, it CAUSES it. Be patient, and your sleep pattern will return to normal, given enough substance free time. In the meantime, watch your caffeine intake, especially later than six hours before you go to sleep.

4. Try meditation and/or yoga, especially if your substance of choice was a stimulant. You will be amazed at how effectively it will relax you!

5. Remember that everyone is an individual, and what works for others might not work for you (and vice versa). There is no one true way.

-Contributed by Craig M.

Volunteer For Sobriety!

Volunteer your time – humane societies, AIDS hospices, retirement homes, political campaigns, soup kitchens and homeless shelters, any cause that is close to your heart and help makes the lives of others better is a wonderful way to build your self-esteem and keep busy, and therefore clean and sober.

-Contributed by Heath

The Write Way to Stay Sober

Keep a journal. Record how using made you feel, including guilt, shame, poor behavior, embarrassment, etc. When you are feeling better and staying abstinent, record those positive feelings as well. Keep those entries handy, so that you can compare them during times of cravings or temptation.

-Contributed by Laura L.

A Home with a Sober Foundation

I am a big fan of making one's living space a constant reminder for sobriety. I have "reminders" posted around my apartment. They include notes stating, "I will not be destroyed by my alcoholism" and "[The Sobriety Priority](#)". I leave recovery literature in view at all times. I collect articles on recovery and there is usually one on my nightstand. My bookshelf has many volumes on recovery that are visible. It would be impossible to be inside my home for more than twenty seconds without knowing that I am an alcoholic in recovery. That's the way I want it.

-Contributed by Mark P.

Let's Rock!

1. If you drink at home after work, DON'T GO HOME! Go to the gym, or the library, or the movies, or a "safe" friend's home. Go to a fast food or other restaurant friendly to your tastes. Change your routine. Put off going home until you have eaten and are tired.

2. If you MUST go home, because of pets or children, take a different route. Drive through a residential neighborhood. Be observant and see what the non-drinkers are doing (like watering their lawns or playing with their kids, even talking to their neighbors). THIS COULD BE YOU!

3. Lose the unstructured free time! Make a plan. Don't find yourself sitting around wondering what to do. If you do, your addiction will tell you what to do. Plan for your days off, at least three or four days in advance. Write it down, and then follow through.

4. Get every single bit of drug and/or alcohol related items out of your house. Leave nothing; nothing for company, no cooking wines or sherry, nothing whatsoever. You

don't keep gasoline in your cupboards, why would you keep any other poisons there? By keeping it on hand, you run the risk of having Lloyd the Bartender (aka the Limbic Brain) call your number sometime when you are feeling rough or have had a bad day.

5. Did you know that they took the skull and crossbones off the labels for poisons because they were concerned that it was frightening people? It should frighten people! Every time you see a package of liquor or drugs, imagine that it has a skull and crossbones on its label. If only it did!

-Contributed by Laura, aka "Bones"

My Personal Clean and Sober Toolkit

1. No Matter What - There is no valid reason on Earth to drink or use again.
2. Commitments - If you make them, keep them. You demonstrate a lot to yourself and others when you do.
3. Sharing - Surprisingly therapeutic when done honestly. Free yourself from holding in your feelings.
4. Phones - Get plenty of numbers of other recovering people and don't be afraid to use them.
5. Willingness - Allow yourself to change. You have nothing to lose by doing this, and much to gain.
6. Approachability - Don't make it difficult for people to connect with you on a basic level. Isolation can be deadly.
7. [Help Other Alcoholics/Addicts](#) - You really can keep it by giving it away.
8. Avoid "Slippery" People, Places and Things - If you cannot avoid them, you must be aware that they are dangerous to your sobriety and proceed with caution.
9. Action - No matter how small it seems.
10. Look at active addicts - Especially when they are trying to pass as clean and sober. Is that a wonderful life? -Contributed by Larry B.

Watch the Behavior!

Even though over the years I have added a lot of tools to my toolbox, changing my behavior made sense then and makes sense now. The first change was, obviously, from drinking/drugging behavior to sober behavior. Then my changes had to be oriented to maintaining the sober state of being. My old friend, Lucybelle, says "Watch the behavior," as it is the best predictor of future outcomes.

I have a lot of tools. Among them, the fact that I consider the use of my sobriety tools daily akin to exercise or eating. I have to do these things to maintain my health and strength. I ran across a quote attributed to J.R.R. Tolkien. "It does not pay to leave a dragon out of your calculations if you live near him." While I am loathe to personify my addiction, I'll buy the metaphor.

I also talk to my family about staying sober. I have been fortunate to have been married to the same woman for twenty-four years. Her love and help have been of inestimable value in my getting and staying sober. So, it is a natural and comfortable part of my life to share my sobriety thoughts and to talk with her. And with my daughter, too, who is here only by reason of the fact that I got sober and stayed sober. My sobriety is a part of all of our lives.

-Contributed by Tom Shelley, Co-Founder of LifeRing and [LSRMail](#) "Listmeister"

Set Up The Mental Projector!

If I spent time wondering why I didn't drink yesterday, I would never get this morning's breakfast or probably lunch made. I have, however, discovered that my superhuman, super heterodyne, Hoover Dam powered intellect doesn't do me much good when I have to fight off the desire for drink.

I use the part of my brain that tells me that I am not a substance abuser. When some part of the brain pops up and says "Why not?" I ask it if it would like to see some old film clips of what happens when I drink. If it wants to see them, I set up the mental film projector and play as much as I can take from my archives. I'm still sober.

-Contributed by MOG

The Simple Tools of My Sobriety

I found simple things to nurture myself that did not cost money or require anyone else. Things like clean sheets, good soap, discovering new types of music, hours in a book store. All of these things are still very helpful to me.

I keep a paper lunch bag with slips of paper in it. Written on the slips are things I want to know more about. When I was/am antsy I pull out a piece of paper and begin researching it - usually online.

I left old relationships. Not only those associated with my using but those that caused me inner turmoil as well, like the people who were constant complainers, and the folks that enjoy monologues - theirs.

And last, but not least, I make eye contact with strangers. When I feel alone, or when I have felt damaged, it helps. I realized that so many of us feel the same way, addicts or not. I have become a people watcher.

-Contributed by Jane K

A Rock-in Sobriety

The very best thing I have ever done to keep the urges at bay is to move rocks. This may seem like a joke, but it truly works. Not only does it keep you busy, but physical labor leaves me with no strength to want to drink. And not just rocks, but also organizing closets or cleaning out the fridge. It's amazing; if you can get your mind busy with something other than using and/or drinking, it will usually take the hint.

-Contributed by Denise S.

Short & Sweet Sobriety Tips

1. Self-help books on recovery, coping skills, anger management, depression, etc.
2. Private Therapy
3. Clubs (Not the kind that serve drinks or sell "medical" marijuana.)

4. Hobbies

5. EXERCISE EXERCISE EXERCISE

6. Chinese medicine

-Contributed by Jason K.

Keep the Beast at Bay

1. Take a snapshot of yourself at your worst. Refer to it when you are tempted to have a drink. Just a glance at my picture is usually enough for me. Even guilt can be used as a tool, but don't wallow in it.

2. Get to recognize "the beast". Treat him as someone else who inhabits your brain, but cares nothing for you, and will do or say anything to get high.

3. As soon as you can manage, plan lots of sober activities. We use car clubs, gaming groups, volunteer work, casual dating or dates with your spouse, luncheons, bird watching, rowing, work around the house.

-Contributed by George

Clean and Sober

Put the drink down and go and have a shower. Put on clean clothes and brush my hair nicely. Now I look acceptable enough to face the rest of my life...Write myself a list of what I am going to be doing with it.

-Contributed by Tania M.

Practically Profound

1. People. I have found that if I am alone or with people who are still using that it is usually just a matter of time before I start to find excuses to use. Being around people who are not using, and specifically people in recovery, I find excuses not to use.

2. Establish phone buddies. Because it can be awkward to ask for help when I really need it, I have found it useful to call one or two phone buddies on a regular basis (every day for me) just to say hi and check in. When I really need them for support I have already established a relationship and it comes naturally to mention any current dilemma and get the support I need. I can also be there to support them, which helps me feel useful.

3. Minimize drama. Too much drama takes me out every time. For myself I find my personal drama has three etiologies:

A) I divert my attention from what is happening in my life.

B) I feed my narcissistic desire to be the center of attention.

C) I have poor decision making capabilities when it comes to how much I should become involved in other people's drama. The key for me is to find out where my drama is coming from and choose to address it in a healthier way.

4. Debriefing at the end of the day. I get together with a friend on the phone or in person and we talk about how our day went. I try to answer the following questions:

A) How did my feelings change throughout the day?

B) What did I do for my sobriety?

C) In what ways did I jeopardize my sobriety?

D) What do I need to do tomorrow?

E) What is something good about myself (different each day).

I usually feel better about how the day went when I do this.

-Contributed by Mark C.

Sobriety Survival Kit

My most dangerous "war zone" is behind the wheel of a car. The car goes on automatic pilot to the nearest drugstore or supermarket where wine is sold, so at all times I carry my Sobriety Survival Kit. It contains, among other things, a jar of bubbles, a harmonica, a kaleidoscope, Tic Tacs, raisins, perfumed skin lotion, a feather duster, a foot roller/massager, castanets, a copy of "Keepers", (a book of the best messages from the early days of the LSR e-mail list)ⁱⁱⁱ, a journal and pen, a clown nose, a Koosh ball, and a pair of white gloves. If I have to go into the grocery store for regular shopping, I put on those gloves because it's impossible to reach for the liquor shelf without noticing them as a reminder of my commitment to sobriety. Of course, all of this is just stage props if I choose to override my intention. But it has saved my butt more than a time or two.

-Contributed by Sally

I Don't Drink!

I can offhand think of three things I do on a daily basis that keep me sober: 1. I don't drink. 2. I don't drink. 3. Lastly, but certainly not least, I don't drink. These have been the only three things that I have consistently done every day over the last eight years. Okay, so they are all one thing. I think you get the idea... I haven't had an urge to drink in a while, so I really don't feel the need to do any ritual around it.

-Contributed by Ben B.

A Sobriety Affirmation

My mantra borrowed from my stop-smoking days 'Drinking never makes anything better' -- the only response that seems to apply to most situations. Although the aforementioned is not a daily affirmation, it is an affirmation nonetheless, pulled out on an as needed basis. –

Contributed by Sherry F.

Sloganeering in Sobriety

Most slogans made me want to puke, more so the more often I heard them.

But two were really useful to me:

1. The first was "Easy Does It". I put a bumper sticker up high in the rear window of my Jeep, the only time I was tempted to use my car as a temperance billboard, and I got some great reactions to it. I was surprised to learn how generic the slogan was; I got recognition from alcoholics, drug abusers, overeaters, gamblers, abusive spouses, and once from somebody in an organization for pedophiles in recovery. My sticker was transparent and faced outward, so when I looked in the rearview mirror the message read normally, left-to-right. Especially in my earliest days of sobriety (or was it because I was younger then?), I needed that message often, and I think the sticker helped me a lot. For sure, it saved me a few speeding tickets.

2. The other slogan is more germane to recent experiences: 'There is no problem I've got that is so bad that taking a drink won't make it worse.' An elaboration on the theme of the LSR slogan: 'I don't drink no matter what,' it made me stop and think during a couple of very critical times. I didn't dust it off very often, but in a crisis situation, it was a lifesaver.

-Contributed by Larry D.

Sober Juice

Take a multi-vitamin with minerals each day, washed down with various flavored waters, soft drinks new to the market since you gave them up for booze, or interesting juices and juice mixes.

-Contributed by Marianne

Sobriety Daily Do

One thing that helped me a lot when I got sober was to actually write down how drinking made me feel, and all the guilt, shame, the behaviors I exhibited, etc. Just having that small, folded piece of paper in my wallet helped a lot... I rarely even looked at it, because I knew what was written there. This was just a little "daily do" that helped me.

-Contributed by Laura L

My Sobriety Toolbox

What worked for me:

1. The "Eureka" moment - accepting at a gut level what my rational mind had always known – that my drinking career was a very slow and torturous method of committing suicide. "If I want to die, why not just go ahead and neck myself?" Which led to: "I'm not ready to die yet – not without at least one serious attempt at a life of accepting reality instead of hiding in a bottle."
2. The paradox of knowing something emotionally vs. rationally finally resolved itself – years of reading Albert Ellis and other writers on CBT/REBT which made perfect sense but which I could never seem to put into practice finally "gelled". I got it at last – at least as far as drinking is concerned.
3. Going back on fluoxetine – finally experiencing the full effects of an anti-depressant without the depressing effects of alcohol countering it – so simple, so true and a revelation to experience to be sure!
4. The ambition to provide an alternative to twelve step groups and the determination to [start LifeRing meetings](#) in Australia once I had enough sober time (and even then I pushed the envelope by starting my first meeting at 3 months sober).

5. Long term, my most powerful personal sobriety tool has been the commitment to LifeRing and the meetings – no way could drinking ever substitute for the personal satisfaction I get from my involvement. After years of being totally self-obsessed, the focus outwards has been a real breath of fresh air to me. If that makes me a co-dependent, tough fifties.

6. Calling myself “Crusader Rabbit” when I get too serious and/or self-critical about my progress or lack thereof with LifeRing Australia!

7. A series of mental tricks or shortcuts or whatever that remind me of my personal realities – over time just repeating the words mentally bring the whole picture into my mind.

8. “C’mon Scarlett” – my method for turning off obsessive thoughts of any kind. Remember the line from “Gone with the Wind”? “If I think about that now I’ll go crazy ... I’ll think about it tomorrow”.

9. “Why not me?” to counter the “Why me?” syndrome. “What’s so special about me that I *should* get life on my terms when nobody else on the planet does?” A reminder to get out of the “entitlement” mind-trap.

10. “Life wasn’t meant to be easy” – a renowned quote from one of our former Prime Ministers.

11. Knowing that feelings are just that – feelings. They are not reality, they are subject to change without notice and are definitely not imperatives that I have to act on immediately! They will pass and change and evolve – they aren’t stars to plot my course by!

12. “I will be my own best friend in recovery instead of my harshest critic”. I would not speak to my worst enemy the way I habitually spoke to myself as a drunk.

13. My personal name for the Beast or the LB or Lloyd the Bartender or whatever – “the drunk”. “So the drunk wants a drink? Too damn bad!”

14. I know there are more mental tricks if I could only remember them – but basically they all boil down to variations of CBT/REBT. I am responsible for my own feelings - it is what I tell myself about other people’s actions that upsets me, not the actions in and of themselves. And that applies especially to me – focusing in on what I am telling myself

about myself to upset myself! In other words - "What I tell myself about myself is a self-fulfilling prophecy"!

-Contributed by Jill T. - LifeRing Australia

The Joy of Sober Life

What I found most useful was tools I used to stop smoking 16 years ago. Stay physically active. Also the use of the old shower when cravings hit. Hard to either smoke or drink in the shower. I would just tell myself if I can get through these few minutes, it will pass and I will be okay.

It is very important I found to discover peer groups whose main occupation is not the consumption of alcohol. I joined a lot of tennis leagues and started playing duplicate bridge. At social functions I went prepared, especially early in sobriety. I took my own drinks to conventions that were out of town. I also planned and did meet someone new at these events who I would tell I did not drink. That way if I thought about drinking there was a new friend who would be surprised if I did. I let my close friends know that I was an alcoholic and would not drink anymore. There was a lot of support for me there and from my spouse, who also stopped drinking (he never did drink much).

I volunteered to do an online support group as soon as I qualified so I could start to give back to others. Most important in early sobriety to me was to PLAN ahead in situations that might be a problem. I always had an exit plan if I was at a drinking event and felt "tempted". My most important tool was constantly reminding myself that someday I would be just a plain old non-drinker and that alcohol would not even get my attention. My latest tool that I am using now is to stay involved with other people. I give of myself by being on boards and working with charities. Now that I am retired and have all this time, I am spending it being involved with people in my community and not drinking myself to death...cause I sure had the time and the money to do that.

I know that everyone is different and that is sure what makes the world go round. The support I found in LifeRing has certainly been very important to me. That is the tool that helped me make it those first few days, weeks and months. Those times when I could not imagine life without that bottle close by when the going got rough...or good...or just going. Sometimes the laughter and fun in the group was much more important than talking about staying sober. I was so scared in early sobriety that I would not make it, that I would die a drunk. To be able to laugh about screw-ups and situations with others who had been through the same stuff really helped.

A friend from LifeRing online called me last night. It was so great to hear the happiness in her voice. This joy of life is of course the final reward for being sober.

-Contributed by Leslie Jo

ii John M. Price 04/07/2004

ii Updated by BC 3/15/2015

iii This book is no longer available, however, there is a “Keepers” section at lifering.org that contains past and present keepers for one’s perusal and enjoyment at: lifering.org/Keepers