

Suppers For Sobriety Frequently Asked Questions General Questions

Q: What is Suppers For Sobriety?

A: Suppers For Sobriety is a table-based recovery group. That means that all meetings involve the preparation and eating of a simple, nutritious meal that supports sobriety. It addresses the need to fill in a gap in the body, mind, spirit approach to healing alcoholics, namely, to heal them through diet and lifestyle changes that loosen the biochemical grip of alcohol on their bodies.

Q: Who is this group for?

A: Suppers For Sobriety can help alcoholics and the people who love them. The diet and lifestyle changes are oriented toward whole foods and blood sugar stabilization. So anyone with a family history of alcoholism and its health relatives -- diabetes, obesity, and some mental health issues like anxiety and depression -- can benefit.

Q: What is the Suppers For Sobriety view on alcoholism as a disease?

A: This question strikes to the heart of our culture's treatment failure. Using the word "disease", alcoholism is not just one. It's many different disease processes that share the common symptom of pathological drinking. The "ism" develops *after* the drinkers' bodies are compromised for a variety of reasons related to biological vulnerability to drink. For many, sensitivity to ethanol itself is the biological set up. For some, self-medicating for anxiety from low blood sugar may initiate the problem drinking. For others, speedy relief from depression due to nutrient deficiencies may start the process. If we take many unrelated biological traps and call them by the one name for the end-state disease – alcoholism – high relapse rate is the logical conclusion.

Q: What do you mean by "Put the body back into the equation"?

A: Alcoholism is a disease of disconnections at many levels: disconnection from our food sources, disconnection from understanding our basic biology, disconnection from family and normal social life. It is said to be a disease of the body, mind, and spirit, but that's not how we treat it. We leave the body out of the equation. The family table is the one place where body, mind, and spirit all come together at the same time, so "putting the body back into the equation" just means re-connecting the body to its rightful place. Right up there with the mind and the spirit.

Q: Why are whole foods so important?

A: At the physical level, alcoholism is the result of a collision course between metabolism and modern culture. Refining processes concentrate sugars and alcohol. These concentrated sugars and alcohol collide with bodies that aren't designed to handle them. Without that underlying physical reality, there wouldn't be alcoholism. To loosen the biochemical grip alcohol has on the alcoholic body, returning to whole foods is a necessary part of the solution. Sobriety sometimes takes place without it, but it's more likely to be very uncomfortable and unsustainable because refined foods keep the cravings alive.

Q: What do processed foods (sugar, flour) actually do?

A: They stoke the flames of craving. They speed their way to the brain like an ambulance to an emergency. But after a lifetime of delivering quick sugar fixes without delivering the nutrients the brain and the rest of the body need to make healthy, happy cells, the body breaks down. Depression, anxiety, obesity, alcoholism, diabetes and many related diseases are the logical conclusion when vulnerable people eat a steady diet of processed foods.

Q. But these are my favorite foods, how could they be a set up for relapse?

A: Foods like bread, pasta, candy, and baked goods send blood sugar rising dangerously fast, just like alcohol, forcing the body to produce insulin. With repeated eating, just like drinking, the mechanisms break down and the body overproduces insulin regularly. That leads to low blood sugar and frequent states of emergency for the brain. The brain's only fuel is glucose, or sugar.

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The body responds to the low blood sugar emergency with intense craving and an adrenaline or "fight or flight" response to force sugar out of storage and into the brain.

Q: By that reasoning, what's wrong with whole wheat and milk products?

A: Maybe nothing. But few people who make it to the point where they have earned the label "alcoholic" have strong digestion. Going off wheat and milk for a while can allow the digestive system to heal. Wheat and dairy foods can be troublesome comfort foods for people with weak digestion. That means for vulnerable people they are traps, more like drugs than food. Suppers For Sobriety provides a setting for learning how to eat without wheat and milk products.

Q: So what do I eat?

A: Single, fresh, whole foods. It's simple, but it may not be easy at first. All of our recipes include adequate supplies of meat, fish, fowl or vegetable protein; high fiber carbohydrates (non-starchy vegetables); beneficial fats like olive oil; and whole grains like brown rice. The recipes are mostly for soups, stews, chili and other one-pot meals that support sobriety and can be made quickly and easily in the context of meetings.

Q: Biologically speaking, what besides blood sugar trouble makes me crave?

A: Poor nutritional status. Blood sugar is just the fuel for the brain, like the gas that runs the car. There's still the car itself to be dealt with. What makes up the nuts and bolts, body and engine of the human vehicle? Food. Given proper food -- and often supplemental nutrients to support brain chemistry -- the body will get both the fuel it needs and the building blocks for the vehicle itself.

Q: Why is Suppers For Sobriety even needed?

A: There is no clear profit motive to any industry or discipline for alcoholics to get well in large numbers, except, of course, to the whole culture. The people who suffer the most, the alcoholics and their loved ones, are stuck with the problem. Even if there were medicines that helped some kinds of alcoholics, there would still be the need for a grassroots movement to get people eating healthy foods at family tables. Even if the new research on, say, using amino acids to improve mood and reduce cravings is right, humans need good food to nourish their cells and rituals like sitting down to shared meals to feed their souls and model healthy behaviors for their children.

Q: What about exercise?

A: It's critical. It's a mood elevator. It's an energy builder. It's a self-esteem raiser. Suppers For Sobriety focuses on "meaningful activity" that keeps people moving, getting physical activity into the patterns of their lives. For some it's a sport; for others it's gardening or walking in nature. One of our meeting formats addresses it specifically, the walking meeting. At a walking meeting, the reading of the literature is reduced to a minimum, a simple meal is prepared ahead, and most of the meeting time is spent outside.

Q: You're reaching out to alcoholics and people with obesity, diabetes, depression and anxiety. Why isn't this group just for alcoholics?

A: The answer is in the biological underpinnings. People with all these problems have nutritional deficiencies. They tend to occur in families as a cluster. At Suppers For Sobriety, we call them "health relatives" because they are health issues that crop up in relatives. The need for nutritious foods, for support creating new patterns of diet and lifestyle, for acquiring the habit of eating at family tables, and all the social and emotional advantages of establishing the family table as a daily ritual benefit them all: alcoholics, diabetics, people with obesity, depression, and/or anxiety. It gives groups the option of forming around a single issue, like alcoholism recovery, or the broader issues of the health relatives.

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Q: Why can't alcoholics exercise their free will and just stop?

A: Some can. The numbers of alcoholics who succeed by just stopping are not all that different from the numbers who achieve sobriety through treatment. The figures we hear range from 20% to 30% after a year. The alcoholic metabolism (what bodies do with what we put in them) screams louder than free will. It's a biological thing.

Q: How will this help prevent relapse?

A: The gift of these diet and lifestyle changes is that they reduce craving and repair cells. Alcoholics are typically damaged in ways that make their bodies scream for exactly the wrong thing. We call it "appetite foolishness". The Suppers For Sobriety meetings model the kind of eating and behavior that heal this problem. They also give people a means of starting good new habits, like eating meals at a family table and carrying on healthy conversations, habits that reduce risk for addiction.

Q: What if Suppers For Sobriety isn't enough?

A: Diet and lifestyle change may not be enough. Suppers For Sobriety does not support any commercial interest. We do, however, provide a forum for members to share things that have worked for them. Our reference section provides the names of some of the researchers in diet and nutrition who put the body back into the body, mind, and spirit equation with the use of nutrients to restore the damaged cells of the alcoholic body. The mind and spirit aspects are well represented by existing groups.

Q: Is Suppers For Sobriety a substitute for other groups or therapy?

A: No. Suppers For Sobriety is for people who are ready to make diet and lifestyle changes and need support getting change into their lives. Although there is clearly a spiritual component in re-creating the rituals of the family table, ours is not focused as a spiritual fellowship.

Q: What does it cost?

A: Participation requires you to cover your own costs only. That means a couple dollars per meeting for groceries and rent, if there is any. The literature is available free on the internet. Actually, the literature is still being developed in pilot projects with recovering alcoholics. At some point we may make printed materials available for a reasonable fee.

Q: Who are you?

A: We are people who care about alcoholics. Our founders are Dor and Cindy. The program is based on Dor's master's thesis for a counseling degree. Cindy was the first person to try the program. Together we have worked with groups of alcoholics and their loved ones, developing the literature and improving the program. We both live in central New Jersey.

Q: Where did the idea for Suppers For Sobriety come from?

A: It started with Dor's dissatisfaction with the disciplines that treat alcoholism. No discipline can own the whole field because the problem straddles so many fields. If counselors come from a psychological background, and doctors come from a pharmaceutical background, and 12-step groups focus on the spiritual aspect, and the physiological piece is not sufficiently represented anywhere, relapse is the logical conclusion. We don't have a place where it's all put together. And we aren't likely to get widespread case management any time soon because insurance carriers don't have a way to make a profit from it. That means there needs to be a grassroots movement championed by the people who have the most to gain. Or lose. Alcoholics and their loved ones.

Q: Is this group research-based?

A: Yes and No. One of the problems of working with alcoholics in recovery is that their problems straddle so many disciplines; it's hard to find a discipline that covers all the areas of need.

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Suppers For Sobriety is based on research from the fields of nutrition and nutritional psychology. The research was done in the context of a master's in counseling program, and the literature was developed by people in a partial care program and an assortment of 12 step groups. So while we don't have statistics to prove to a scientist that this approach works, it is all based on research and developed by people for whom diet and lifestyle changes have made a difference.

Q: Where are you located?

A: The pilot projects that are currently developing the literature are located in the Princeton, NJ area.

Q: How do we start a pilot project?

A: We're at the beginning of this process. As we write the literature, test it, and improve it, we'll be posting it on this site. A big part of this is collecting personal stories, the main vehicle for instruction. If you have a group of people who want to lead healthier lives in body, mind, and spirit, who want to participate in the co-creation of Suppers For Sobriety, please write to us. We'll stay in communication as you try on our format and literature.

Q: What do you mean by "detox"?

A: There are two kinds of detox. In the first moments of recovery, closely monitored medical detox is life saving. After the emergency is over however, the addicts' body is still in alcohol's biochemical grip. The body is depleted after years of using toxic substances in the nutrients required for good health and good mood. Also, the body still carries a lot of garbage around, evidenced by fatigue, anxiety, depression, and craving, to name a few. Suppers For Sobriety can't help with the urgent moments of early detox; that is a medical matter. Suppers For Sobriety does however, address the needs for detoxifying for long term sobriety. Meal by meal, day by day, through weeks and months, the toxic load goes down as the nutritional status and good habits of mind and body increase. Meal by meal, over time, alcohol's biochemical grip is loosened. Faster and more thorough detox with the help of nutrients may require professional help (see References).

Q: Why doesn't Suppers For Sobriety make specific nutrient recommendations?

A: There are two reasons:

1. Every individual has extremely different needs. And while certain recommendations apply to the whole population, like eating single, fresh, whole foods, the use of specific nutrients is too individual for general recommendations.
2. Suppers For Sobriety does not promote commercial interests. The point is well taken that nutrients are often required to rebuild the broken glands and craving brains of people with alcoholism and its health relatives (obesity, diabetes, and mental health problems like anxiety and depression). What Suppers For Sobriety does help with is establishing good habits of body and mind: sitting down to regular healthy meals, using the group setting to share nutrition information and experiences, and modeling good diet and lifestyle habits for our children at family tables everywhere.

Q: What is the Suppers For Sobriety Forum?

A: The Suppers For Sobriety Forum is a designated portion of the standard meeting format to which group members may bring literature and references from outside sources. While most of the meeting is based on our own literature, we recognize the great value of members' personal experience with other groups, books, therapy, and so forth. The Suppers For Sobriety Forum allows people to share their excitement, experiments, successes and failures. It provides a forum for outside speakers, as long as speakers limit their talks to educational purposes and avoid commercial messages. With the Suppers For Sobriety Forum we can both benefit from the wisdom of other sources AND protect our members from being treated like a market for profit-making interests.