

Mark's Story

My first psychotic episode was in college when I became very paranoid and imagined that people were out to kill me. I spent a couple of weeks in a psychiatric ward, which helped me feel better. I went on to complete college, graduating near the top of my class.

But after that, things went downhill. My symptoms of schizophrenia and depression escalated, leading to 11 psychiatric hospitalizations, two sets of electroshock treatments, and a host of psychiatric medications. The medications were almost always a problem for me because of their unpleasant side effects. I made one half-hearted suicide attempt when I could no longer bear to live with the ongoing visual and auditory hallucinations, which had brought me to complete mental and physical exhaustion.

Key Tip: Establish a meaningful wellness routine

I successfully rebuilt my identity by establishing healthy and positive routines that are personally rewarding and provide me with valued roles in the community. I bike regularly and participate in other outdoor fitness activities.

My parents provided me with a lot of support during the time I was ill, but it reached the point where I had to move out of their home to seek treatment. After one of my hospitalizations, I was transferred to a nursing home, where I was fortunate enough to get connected to a mental health organization. This organization provided counseling services, job placement, and affordable housing, which played a significant role in my recovery. The staff gave me the practical assistance and compassionate understanding I needed to make positive steps toward recovery. I learned valuable skills like action planning and journaling, which have helped me in the self-management of my conditions.

Key Tip: Take a holistic approach to wellness

Take a holistic approach to your health, both mental and physical. All aspects of your health - emotional, financial, environmental - all these different dimensions of wellness are important.

Additionally, I found that focusing on improving my physical health, wellness, and nutrition had a powerful effect on my mental well-being. My own efforts to manage both my physical and mental health, in addition to services and support from the mental health organization, have enabled me to recover from serious mental illness.

Mark's Self-Management Strategies

- **Action Planning:** Early on in my recovery, I used alcohol and cigarettes to self-medicate my condition. I found some relief using these substances, but they were unhealthy and addictive. I worked with my therapist to develop an action plan to quit using alcohol and tobacco. Quitting not only improved my physical health, but also increased my self-confidence by showing myself that I could set an important goal and achieve it.
- **Journaling:** My use of willpower through writing helps me overcome my challenges. It is helpful for me to journal and keep a written record of my progress. To learn more about interactive journaling, visit SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) at <http://legacy.nreppadmin.net/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=333>.
- **Social Supports:** I enjoy biking, so I organized a biking club, which allowed me to form meaningful and supportive friendships with other cyclists. Additionally, my family and my wife have always been supportive of me. Their unconditional love and kindness have made it much easier for me to self-manage my condition and recover from it.