

## Staying away from the first one

“The bomb is in the first one” is a common statement in recovery communities. If you are an addict, or even a problem user, once you have one, you are unable to stop.

### Staying away from the first drug

Have you told yourself: “Never again!”? And then do you think: “Yes, but that’s what happened because of the last drug – not the first one. That first one never hurt me”? This is the common pattern of thinking that addicts demonstrate.

Addiction can be inherited, and it is a disease. So, you know that you are not responsible for your genes or becoming sick with addiction. *However*, you are very much responsible for your behavior and staying away from your drug. Luckily, it is only the first one you have to stay away from.

Once you have the first taste of your drug, you can become powerless over the outcome. Many people have tried and failed. After some time in recovery, addicts often think it will be safe to “just have one or two” more hits of their drug again. Addicts report that sometimes, they are indeed able to have one or two hits for the first few days, or even longer. However, over time, they find themselves again powerless over the amount of the drug they crave and need to use.

It is best to avoid the first one, one day at a time, to avoid relapsing. If you are an addict, you will never be able to have “just one” without slipping back into addiction, either immediately or in a little while. That’s why we say: “The bomb is in the first one.” If you don’t have the first one, you don’t set off the ticking bomb.

When you come face to face with the reality that you cannot make a change by yourself, it is terrifying and liberating at the same time. Addiction causes powerlessness and unmanageability – powerlessness over your addiction is the cause and unmanageability is the effect. Thankfully, powerlessness and unmanageability have brought you to the point where you have sought a new solution in your life, because your old ways of dealing with the powerlessness and unmanageability are too painful.

Unmanageability is the outward evidence of your powerlessness. There are two types of unmanageability:

1. Outward unmanageability (the kind that can be seen by others).
2. Inner, or personal, unmanageability.

Outward unmanageability is often identified by things like family or relationship problems, financial or job difficulties or losses, unpaid bills, arrests, accidents, damage to you, others or property, changes in your personality and unmanageable outward behaviors when you are using or trying not to use.

Inner unmanageability is all about your inner life driving you crazy. Your thoughts and emotions are out of control, and you have no idea how to manage them comfortably, with or without using your drug.

Put simply, you have lost the power or ability to manage your life very well. You might feel fine inside, but your outer life is unravelling fast, and stuff just keeps falling apart around you. Or your outer life might appear great, but inside you feel like a mess and your mind is obsessively tormenting you. Or the worst place of all, your life might be observably crumbling before yours and other people's eyes and you are a mess in your mind and/or body.

This is a special kind of hell, well known and never forgotten by recovered addicts. You are in the right place, whichever is the case. You are on the road from misery to happiness today! Just don't pick up that first one, no matter what, and continue one day at a time to build your strength in recovery. Reach out to those you trust. You can get through it if you really want to recover. Promise.

### **Signs of powerlessness/unmanageability**

Here are some signs that you may have become powerless, and your life has become unmanageable due to your drug use:

- You can't wait to leave work – not to see your family or partner or friends, but to use.
- You're reluctant to attend family functions or any other social obligations where using is not part of the agenda.
- You're able to use your drug recreationally for a little while, but eventually you always slip back into regular habitual using.
- You go out intending to use a set amount, but find that when you run out, you need more and will do virtually anything to get it.
- While under the influence, you do things you would never otherwise do, such as engaging in risky sexual behavior, domestic violence or driving while intoxicated, etc.
- You struggle to pay bills on time and may even couch-surf with friends or other drug-users.
- You don't eat a proper diet, sleep irregularly (too much/not enough) and don't take care of physical hygiene the way you used to.
- Your relationships and friendships suffer as a result of your drug use.
- You form new friendships with people who don't really care about you because they are even more deeply involved in their own drug use than you are.
- You feel moody, irritated, anxious or depressed, or a combination of all of them, when you aren't using and perhaps even when you are using.
- You isolate yourself and take solace even further in your drug.

Do you recognize any of the above signs? If so, you're in the right place. Remember, it starts with the first one. If you don't have the first one, you can't get into further trouble and you can get better, one day at a time.

Ask yourself this...

"What will it cost me if I don't change?" You can change it. Just don't pick up the first one. Denial is the part of our disease that tells you that you don't have a problem. It says things like: "I'm only hurting myself, not anyone else", "This is the only thing that fixes me", "I don't use that much", "I'm not the problem – everyone else is", "I do everything for others, so I deserve to use", "I've never stolen/been arrested/been fired, so I'm not addicted", "I would never steal/get arrested/get fired, so I'll never be an addict" and "One can't hurt me: I'll just use this one last time".

If you allow yourself to remain in denial about your drug use, you will not be able to stay away from the first one in the future. You must start to understand your powerlessness over that first one.

Classic denial behaviors, leading to picking up the first one again, include:

- Blaming. If you find yourself blaming anybody or anything else for your drug use, you could be heading for the first one.
- Minimizing the risk or the effects the drug has had in your life.
- Maximizing your fears and other negative emotions.
- Playing the victim role.

None of these behaviors will help you, so let's look at what will.

### **Psychic change**

In the early 1930s, Carl Jung, the father of modern psychology, said: "The chances [of recovery for addicts] is the same as being hit by lightning." Despite his knowledge and experience working successfully with many different disorders, his view on addiction was loud and clear. However, because of what he witnessed in the recovery community from that time on, Jung changed his tune. He noticed that alcoholics and addicts were starting to recover through what he described as "a complete psychic change". This still holds true today.

A "psychic change" basically means that you have prolonged abstinence from your drug, coupled with changes to your personality (that is, the way you feel, think and behave). It's simple. With help, one day at a time, you can change the way you think, feel and behave. Rehab and recovery support groups can assist you because it takes practice, repetition and support from like-minded people to alter your feelings, thoughts and behaviors, and to achieve sustainable change.

### **Jellinek's Curve of the Progression of Addiction**

By the end of the 1940s, Dr Elvin Jellinek, an American biostatistician, physiologist, alcoholism researcher and the author of the 1942 book, *Alcohol Addiction and Chronic Alcoholism*, had posited "the disease concept of alcoholism". His work rocketed alcoholism into the medical arena and later helped classify addiction as a disease in the annals of medicine and psychiatry. Today Jellinek's theory is accepted as a blueprint for *any* form of addiction.



As you fall deeper into despair and struggle to maintain your life, Jellinek explains that you will likely be trapped in a vicious cycle of obsessive drug use. Your sense of hopelessness pushed you to seek help, and thankfully you have engaged in our program of recovery and rehabilitation. This is the last stage in Jellinek's Curve.

Congratulations! You have embraced "an honest desire for help". At this time, two other critical things happen: you find out that addiction is an illness, and you learn that the harmful patterns of addiction can be stopped. You then realize that a life without your drug is possible and that recovery holds opportunities for personal fulfillment.

Interacting with people who have successfully recovered and achieved a happier life provides encouragement at this transitional and important time. This is one reason that we encourage ongoing recovery group membership such as 12-Step, SMART, Refuge, and other community recovery groups.

### **You can heal**

For you to heal from addiction or problem drug use, its physical, mental and spiritual damage must be addressed. Assisting you to develop thoughts and behaviors that support recovery is a main goal of Miracles@Home. Here, you will learn to recognize harmful rationalizations you once used to support your drug use. This will help you avoid relapse triggers and develop a healthier mindset.

We will help you to have the healthy life and future that was impossible during your drug use. When you admit and accept that the bomb is in the first drug, you are at the point where you are willing to change. Once you understand that this is a brain disorder, you can start to heal.

Admitting powerlessness over your drug and the unmanageability it causes, and accepting that you need to learn and change, is the first step. Hopefully, over time, you will begin to believe that *the bomb is in the first one*, and stay away from that first one, a day at a time, in the future.

## References

Ward, J., Bejarano, W., Babor, T.F., & Allred, N. (2016) Are-Introducing Bunky at 125: E. M. Jellinek's Life and Contributions to Alcohol Studies, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 77 (375-386)

## Recommended videos

Alcoholism is a Disease and It's Not Alcohol Abuse  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zADTxr5QDE> (11.14min)

Mel Gibson Talks About Alcoholism  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1yzoYTnPWA> (7:43min)

## Reflective Questions: Staying away from the first one

1. Do you believe that your addiction is a disease? If not, why not? If so, how do you feel about having a disease? Is it a relief, or are you upset about it?

2. Where do you truly believe you lose control over your drug intake? The first one? Number six? Number 20? (Be honest. It is important that you don't pretend to believe what we tell you. Your understanding of your problem will continue to grow and change. There are no right or wrong answers. The reflective questions are for your private records and your own awareness processes.)

3. Sometimes it can be easier to identify how you become powerless in areas of your life other than your relationship with your drug. Can you identify with any of the emotions below in relation to the connection you have, or had, with your drug of choice? Circle the ones that you relate to

**Anger   Frustration   Stress   Sadness   Depression   Anxiety**

Expand on the one/s you have circled.

4. Can you relate to situations where you have felt completely powerless?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Expand on this.

5. What has been the solution to those situations? Write down some of your own examples, such as talking to someone, asking for help, stopping doing what you were doing, etc.

6. Write down what powerlessness means to you.

7. Write down in detail three different experiences where you were powerless over your feelings, thoughts and/or behaviors while using.

a)

  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  

b)

  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  

c)

8. Write down what unmanageability means to you.

9. Write down in detail three different examples of how your life during your time of active using has become unmanageable.

a)

  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  

b)

  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  

c)

10. What pain or fear do you associate with stopping your addiction?

11. What will it cost you if you do **not** stop using?

12. What are the **benefits** you could gain from not using your drug?

13. How has your drug use impacted on your important relationships?

14. Have you lost self-respect and/ or suffered damage to your reputation due to your drug use? If so, how?

15. Has using your drug made your home life unhappy? If so, how?

16. Has using your drug caused any type of illness or health issue? If so, list here?

17. Do you turn to, or hang around with, the types of people who enable you to use your drug? Are you willing or able to distance yourself from them for a while, until you become stronger in recovery? Who can you turn to for help and company?

18. What aspects of your drug use, if any, do your loved ones, friends, family or business associates object to the most?

19. What type of abuse, if any, has happened to you and/ or others in your family or close circles due to your drug use?

20. List examples of what you have done in the past to fix, control or change your drug use.

21. If your drug use is an important problem in your life that needs to be changed, why haven't/couldn't you change it?

22. Are you now willing to do whatever it takes to have your life changed, healed, or transformed while stopping your drug use?

23. If your answer to the previous question was “yes”, write down (do not type) and then say aloud to yourself and people who are supporting your recovery (if you wish) the following: *“I admit that I am powerless over my drug use and that my life has become unmanageable. I cannot, unaided and with my present understanding, manage my drug use. I must not, and will not, have the first one, no matter what!”* Then write or discuss any realistic and achievable strategies to maintain your recovery today, and one day at a time into your brand new wonderful future.