

**Addiction and Recovery:
The Emotional Highs and Lows of Early Recovery
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When someone makes a decision to get the help that they need to quit drinking and using other drugs, everything begins to change. As an addict's body begins to detox and as she is consciously trying to interrupt the momentum of addicted use of a chemical (including alcohol), she goes through all kinds of changes. Physical detox can involve a wide range of possible symptoms, including physical, psychological, and emotional. The addict who is involved in trying to separate herself from the chemical often experiences an emotional rollercoaster. Depression is common. Anxiety and fear are common. Mood swings are equally common. She might cycle quickly from sadness, shame, and guilt to hope and joy about quitting.

Early recovery is also a time of introspection. As emotions are changing quickly, the newly recovering person tries to make sense of this flood of emotion. They are also assessing their relationships, their work, their social life, their motivations, their beliefs, and their history, trying to make sense of it all.

Because emotions are often so labile in early recovery, family members often make the assumption that the addict is still using. They don't know how else to explain it, since they expect that the addict will begin to be better immediately and steadily. However, a roller coaster effect of emotional high and lows is to be expected in early recovery as the chemicals leave your body, a little at a time, and as you confront issues that have been stuffed come to the foreground.

In early recovery, feelings return to life. Recall that alcohol and other mood altering drugs, do just that; they alter your mood. Your feelings or emotions are part of your mood. Think about the times that you used alcohol or other mood altering drugs to change to how you felt, whether you were bored, angry, tired, hurt, sad, lonely, or helpless. Alcoholics and addicts even use chemicals to alter positive feelings such as joy. So, if over a long period of time, you had been using drugs to numb those feelings and you stopped numbing them, they would rebound with a vengeance.

When you or your addicted loved one feels those ups and downs, recognize that the body and mind are detoxing. Being aware that a rollercoaster effect on the emotions are common to early recovery helps to keep this temporary condition in its proper perspective. An helpful way to look at these highs and lows, is to acknowledge the need for new feelings management skills and to develop new skills regarding those uncomfortable, pesky feelings. Early recovery is a golden opportunity to learn how to appropriately identify, label, own, express, and work through feelings. Some alcoholics and addicts have these feelings management skills. If you don't, now is a good time to learn. You are going to need those skills for the rest of your life.