



## A Rebellion Dogs Blog

October 2019

Recovery, Wellness and Eco-stewardship

Do you suffer from something called, eco-anxiety?

Senior Editor at *The Atlantic*, James Hamblin defines this Century-21 contagion as the dread and helplessness that come with watching the impact of climate change.

“He has tasted good and evil in your bedrooms and your bars and he’s traded in tomorrow for today,” to borrow from Kris Kristofferson<sup>i</sup>. Ecology, economy, consumption, addiction: these environmental systems within which that we interact, make us—as the environment’s stewards—look more like the monkeys being put in charge of the zoo (and I suspect this is unfair to monkeys). How do you feel when you hear about our pollution causing catastrophic climate change, the less fortunate starving in the countries that produce the goods and food that we consume? Is your reaction worry, guilt, anger, despondency or a call to action?

In his 2017 book, *Recovery*, Russell Brand shared his views regarding our human consumption tendencies:

“I believe we live in an age of addiction where addictive thinking has become almost totally immersive. It is a mode of our culture. Consumerism is stimulus and responses as a design for life. The very idea that you can somehow make your life alright by attaining primitive material goals ... is quite wrong. Addiction is when natural biological imperatives, like the need for food, sex, relaxation or status, becomes prioritized to the point of destructiveness.”<sup>ii</sup>

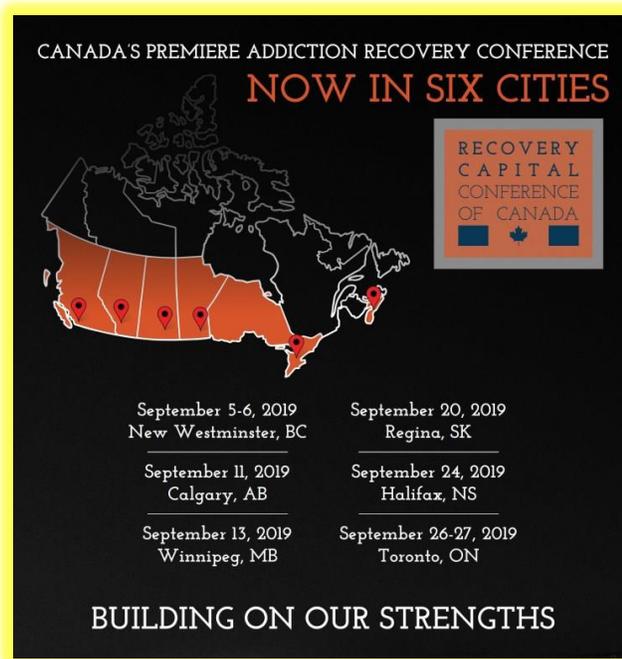
On a more positive note, *recovery capital* is a measure of our wellness—it’s not strictly “abstinence from a stated substance/behavior”; it’s more global than how many days away we are from our sobriety date. Optimal recovery isn’t merely restoring ourselves to some previous status; for me, certainly for many, *recovery* is better than any time in our past. Dr. Ray Baker and Last Door’s Jessica Cooksey of

Last Door Recovery Society defined *recovery capital*, on tour for the September 2019 cross-Canada Recovery Capital Conference, and it includes four elements:

1. Cessation of addictive behavior
2. Improved global health
3. Improved level of function
4. Increased [prosocial behavior](#)

This four-part measurement isn't a rigid framework that demands consensus from everyone—each of us may all have a unique definition of our recovery—but it's the framework to which researchers measure efficacy and/or addiction recovery outcomes.

In our recovery capital, we live better, get better and interact better in the world. The Recovery Capital Conference drew attention to recent studies of people living in recovery, conducted in the last few years around the world. Results reveal that not only are people in recovery more charitable and more engaged in cooperative citizenry compared to our previous lives in addiction; we are also more altruistic than the general population.

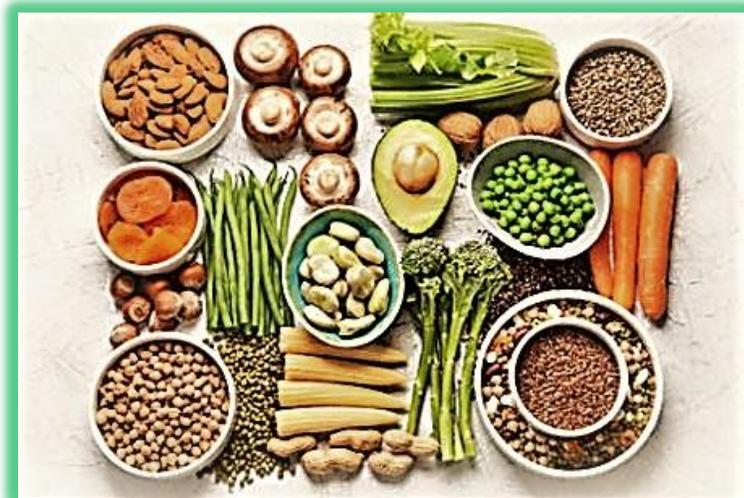


Nothing assuages our guilt or quiets our self-absorbed rumination than empathy for another. Living in Recovery studies show that—maybe as part of our recovery regimen—we are civically engaged and generous with time, talents and our discretionary income.

This August, *The Atlantic*<sup>iii</sup> presented some simple facts to counter the helplessness of “What can I do about climate change?”

In the article, [“If Everyone Ate Beans Instead of Beef: With one dietary change, the U.S. Could almost meet greenhouse-gas emission goals,”](#) James Hamblin demonstrates that it doesn’t take all-or-nothing change to make a difference.

Stop eating beef.



This isn’t a vegan rant; he invites us to keep eating our bacon and chicken wings. Just eat plant-based meat replacements instead of burgers and steak. This one half-measure sacrifice you and I could make, can change the world.

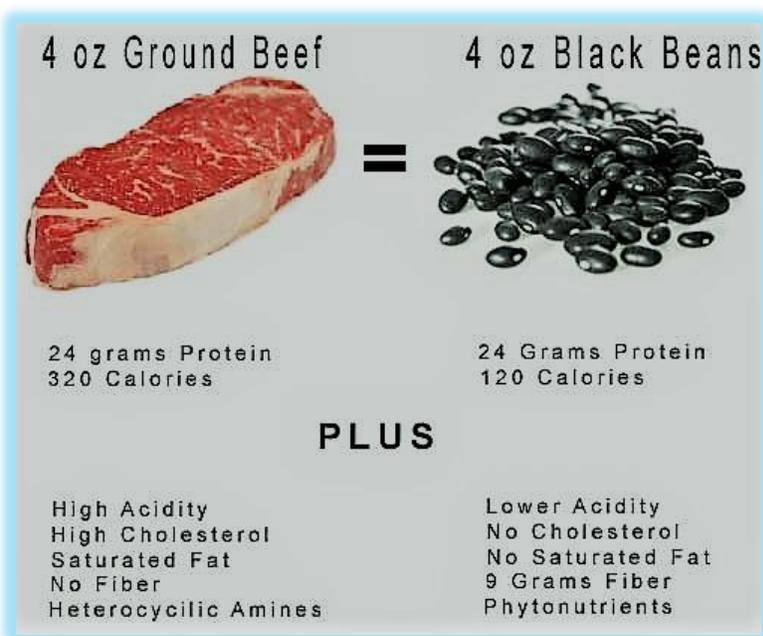
Even in recovery, addicts like me still have a bag of tricks for avoiding-techniques that don’t require a new sobriety date; these tricks include distraction, obsession, compulsion and magical thinking. Still, we can’t un-ring a bell and it’s hard to unlearn hard truths or even inconvenient truths.

*The Atlantic* connects greenhouse gases and our breakfast, lunch and dinner choices. You can dismiss this, take on the challenge for 90-days or go all the way with food choices that’s best for the environment. Some of our recovery community abstain from participation in the whole supply and demand of animal protein (dairy, fish, chickens, pigs, sheep). No more honey or leather, either for all-in vegans. We may do it because we care about animals or just about our precarious fate tied to our eating habits. People are going hungry today. If that’s your call to action, this remedy is also found in lowering the demand for animal protein in our diet.

My math might be slightly off, but where beef is concerned, I believe it takes 17 pounds of plant protein to create one pound of beef. Is this a way to nourish 17-times more people? And besides addressing malnutrition, we also lessen the demands on scarce ground water and reduce greenhouse-causing methane. There’s a big carbon footprint to this weekend’s pot-roast.

We have more access to information than our recovery predecessors did. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*' findings have been out since 2003:

The World Health Organization recently reported that more than 3 billion people are malnourished. This is the largest number and proportion of malnourished people ever recorded in history. In large measure, the food shortage and malnourishment problem is primarily related to rapid population growth in the world plus the declining per capita availability of land, water, and energy resources.



If my burger depletes more land/water/energy resources that the equivalent nutritional injection from plant-based food, and that means someone else goes hungry as a result, how can this not influence my sober second thought?

The point *The Atlantic* makes is small changes count, too. Feel hostile about having your steak or burger taken away? Cut

down to one beef serving each month or each week, instead of completely. If you buy the science argued in the article, any positive change will help. When offered *The Atlantic's* means of reversing our ecological damage, that takes away the hopelessness of, "What can one person's actions do?!?!?"

But wait; isn't diet or climate change an "outside issue" that risks dividing recovery communities who ought to be sticking to our primary purpose? This "stick to the knitting" thinking isn't widely held among your recovery peers. In the Canadian 2015 study, [Life in Recovery from Addiction](#). Participants were asked a number of questions over several themes about substance use and what recovery from alcohol and other drugs looks like, today. Along with meetings, therapy, medicine or treatment, respondents were asked to report on their recovery life more broadly.

From a menu of choices, participants checked off one or more supports to their recovery...

- “Nutritional plan or diet” was checked off by 70% of respondents and
- “Relationship to land and natural environment” was a factor for 67% of respondents.

Contextually, diet and the environment ranked lower than “relationships with friends and family,” “meditation,” “recovery reading” and “exercise.” However, diet/environment were more important supports to recovery than “smartphone apps,” “yoga” or “social media.” So, yeah, most people in recovery consider the food they eat and our environmental impact to be more vital to their recovery than this blog. I’m fine with that.

Of respondents who recognize diet as integral to recovery, 89.5% rate this support as very important or somewhat important. Relationship to land or natural environment was somewhat or very important to 88.3% of respondents.<sup>v</sup>

So, can we really call food and climate “outside issues”? Our 12-Step fellowship won’t be campaigning on pro-vegan behavior any time soon but our fellow home group members are taking a stand and voting with their grocery and menu choices. These Life in Recovery Canadian findings are not unusual when compared to other surveys from other countries.

Altruism is done, of course for the wellbeing of others but the unavoidable psycho/social/physical karma-pay-back from acts of selflessness include:

1. the release of endorphins,
2. improved mental and physical health,
3. feelings of gratitude and satisfaction.<sup>vi</sup>

This isn’t self-help leftist woo-woo. This is scientific findings. Charity and kindness evokes happiness, self-efficacy and enhanced positive self-evaluations.<sup>vii</sup>

We take our own inventory and we don’t judge others, right? Still, our inventory may lead to thinking about the company we keep. The “Group of Druggies” or “Group of Drunks” does represent a type of *higher power*, or *power of example* that influences our choices. Positive prosocial behavior is contagious and so is enabling destructive behavior. Hanging around AA or NA, we may be more likely to be in the

company of smokers and excessive coffee drinkers? What a rich history; AA's founders, died of cancer (Dr. Bob) and emphysema (Bill W), possibly both associated with preventable, reversible illness affected by lifestyle choices.

A higher percentage of people in recovery smoke, compared to the general population. I see some treatment facilities offering a smoking area for clients and others include smoking cessation as part of the treatment. I don't smoke but I wonder if this no drugs, no drinking, no smoking rigidity is an overreach into radical purity, forgetting that even smokers in recovery are better citizens and family members than they were when these smokers were drinking. My inclination may be true, but what is bearing out is that by continuing smoking relapse is more likely than for non-smokers:

The researchers found that people who smoked cigarettes at the initial interview and who were still smoking 3 years later were about 1.5 times more likely to use drugs and twice as likely to have [Substance Use Disorder] SUD at follow-up than those who quit smoking. Among non-smokers at the initial interview, those who had started to smoke between interviews were almost 5 times more likely to report substance use at the follow-up compared with those who did not smoke. (National Institute on Drug Abuse May 2018)<sup>viii</sup>

If you or I keep smoking while giving up addiction to other substances, relapse is statistically more likely. If we smoke and we're a bad influence on others, they are more likely to relapse on their drug of (no) choice.

A 2008 Brown University Medical School research study<sup>ix</sup> camped out around AA meetings in Nashville and concluded, "coffee and cigarette use among AA members is greater than among the general U.S. population."

"Hey, let me show you my 25-year NA key tag; hold my coffee and cigarette and I'll get it out of my pocket." Yes this "clean and sober" example of the 12-Steps at work is in recovery and meets the definition of recovery capital referred to above.

Recovery is a continuum, no matter how black-and-white we want to define it. My sobriety date from drugs and alcohol hasn't changed since 1976 but my trajectory has not been 100% improving health, 100% improving prosocial, 100% improving functionality.

Ten and twenty years in, I've found myself starting again in other mutual-aid groups; I've struggled with mood and behavioral disorders. No one gets to dictate to you or me what our recovery journey ought to be. Mine hasn't been a puritan's life; it's not about being perfect. For me, recovery involves a periodic inventory of what I stand for and how I'm doing. How am I being influenced by those around me? What kind of example am I to others? These are questions I ask.

I am more than comfortable in the company of society's undesirables. People who need love the most, deserve it the least. How many people have loved me more than I deserved over the years? I can surely play it forward. I don't refuse to talk recovery with smoking newcomers. But I need to balance this with positive influences; I have people who subscribe to a whole-food, plant-based diets in my life, people who are as committed to exercise as they are to meetings, people who talk about good sleep-hygiene, civic engagement and environmental stewardship.

In terms of my own food-righteousness; I am gentle with myself. Being better about eating food with a lower carbon footprint is a "progress—not perfection" tenet for my sobriety. Rigidity is its own addictive trap. It's the unhealthy extreme of order in my life, the same way chaos is the unhealthy extreme of spontaneity. I aim for wellness, not perfection. "Impossibly good" as a goal, depletes recovery capital as far as I'm concerned.

I've talked before about my new mantra of, "I strive for 'sober enough' today."

I'm not trying to be the poster child for all that recovery can be. I'm a sample of recovery and I don't want the weight of being "the" example. Growth for me affects all the choices I make, in how I vote, spend my free time, the food I eat are part of this growth. I never wake up the next morning and I wish I had the burgers and chocolate cake the night before.

I hope this blog hasn't regressed into a preachy rant. What "sober enough" means for each of us is very personal. What's for lunch?

Here's the "Beans for Beef" *The Atlantic* article:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/08/if-everyone-ate-beans-instead-of-beef/535536/>

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- <sup>i</sup> *The Pilgrim Chapter 33*, Kris Kristofferson
- <sup>ii</sup> Brand, Russell, *Recovery: Freedom from our Addictions*, London, Bluebird 2017
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/08/if-everyone-ate-beans-instead-of-beef/535536/>
- <sup>iv</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/ajcn/article/78/3/660S/4690010/>
- <sup>v</sup> <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/CCSA-Life-in-Recovery-from-Addiction-Report-2017-en.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://www.addictionland.com/index.php/blogs/entry/altruism-in-recovery-benefits-more>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5011126/>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.drugabuse.gov/news-events/nida-notes/2018/05/cigarette-smoking-increases-likelihood-drug-use-relapse>
- <sup>ix</sup> [https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2008-07/ace-cac071308.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-07/ace-cac071308.php)