



Stories of recovery from addiction:

# *Spanish chicken*

## **I got addicted to heroin because I lived with someone who was also addicted.**

After a year or so I realised I didn't have a life. My habit was like a ball and chain holding me back. Each day was only about getting and taking more drugs. I had started shoplifting to buy them. At one point it dawned on me that the only thing I had eaten in a week was a doughnut! Then I knew that this was no life and I wanted to be healthy and feel alive again.

So I went to a doctor and was prescribed the methadone therapy and was on that for about a year and a half. I used heroin too but when I moved house to where there was less heroin about, I just stuck to the methadone. I was on 30ml a week, and how I got off it was by reducing my dosage, so I took 1ml less each week: 29ml the next week, then 28ml the next, until I was down to a teaspoonfull a week and then just a drop, until finally I was off it completely. It took about nine months to do this. By coming off it this way the withdrawal symptoms weren't that bad, and I felt really lucky! Although I told my doctor what I was doing he didn't offer any support. I had to do this for myself, with the help of some counselling, because I wanted to be completely free of drug addiction.

By reducing my dosage slowly, by 1ml a week, like taking a plane down to land gently and carefully, my body didn't even notice the reduction and there were no awful withdrawals. It was easy for me to do it this way. I was prescribed valium during the last couple of months, which helped.

As I came off I started to feel more alert and stopped sleeping so much during the day. I felt really good and had so much more energy. But about a year later, through social and recreational use, I got addicted to heroin again. So it was back to see a doctor, and again I think I'm really lucky because this one prescribed the right things to help me get off the heroin. I was going to France for 6 weeks with my dad, who was doing up a house for someone, and the doctor gave me valium and also dihydrocodeine, with a letter to get it through customs. I stockpiled it before we went and then when I was in France I did exactly the same thing as I had done to get off methadone: I just came down, gradually, taking less and less each day. When I was off the opiates I used a bit more of the valium, then reduced this daily until I didn't need any drugs at all. I was no longer addicted. And I had no withdrawal symptoms whatsoever; I didn't lose a night's sleep!

I kept myself physically very active during the day: I rotavated the garden, went cycling. I ate really healthily. In fact food was one of the first things I noticed that was different about me. When I woke up in the morning, instead of thinking about drugs, I was just interested in what food there was in the fridge. I was having cereal for breakfast and even cooked breakfasts again. Oh the pleasure of a big cream cake! One meal I made, which I can still remember, was Delia's Spanish Chicken: rice in the bottom of the pan, oil, olives, sundried tomatoes, onions, oranges and chicken legs, all baked together - delicious. It was so good to enjoy food again. It took me six weeks to detox, and I was really proud of myself.

When I was back living in the UK, I did have a couple of short relapses, but only for a week at a time. You just know how much better it feels to be off drugs and feeling healthy.

When I gave birth to my son, as we were taking him home in the car, we drove past an estate where I'd bought heroin in the past and I looked down at my baby and I made a promise to him that I would never take it again. I've kept my promise and that was seven years ago. Beating drug addiction is one of the biggest achievements of my life.

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You can read other stories  
of recovery from addictions at  
**[www.storiesofrecovery.org.uk](http://www.storiesofrecovery.org.uk)**

Thank you to the participants who were kind  
enough to share their stories for the greater good.

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