

BOOKLET 1

# WOMEN'S PRISON SURVIVAL GUIDE:

A Woman's Guide to Holistic  
Well-Being in Prison



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**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**Nutrition and Exercise  
While Incarcerated**

# CHAPTER ONE

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When you hear you'll be doing time, it can feel like your life is over. But life doesn't end or even pause with the strike of a gavel. It continues, and while many things will be out of your control, the quality of your sentence depends largely on the decisions—even the smallest ones—you make right now.

Making the most of your prison experience starts with a commitment to taking care of yourself to the best of your ability. Your body, mind, and spirit are all connected, and taking care of each part contributes to your overall well-being and resilience.

Remember, the goal is not only to survive prison, but if you're like 95% of those who will be released, to also come out better on the other side. That way, you'll never have to come back. Or, if prison will be your home with no out date in sight, the objective is to find ways to live a meaningful life where you are right now as you become a healthy, productive member of your new community.

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## Food in Prison—Making the Most of It

Funded by taxpayers, prison food is prepared as economically as possible. You can expect starchy carbohydrates and greasy fats because these items are cheaper to prepare for large groups of people. Lean proteins, fresh fruits, and fresh vegetables are not as easy to find. While you can survive on the typical prison diet, these foods can have negative effects on your body over time.

In addition to the food served in the chow hall, you might be tempted to use food to manage your emotions. Reaching for the package of cookies in your locker might make you feel numb for a moment, but in the long term, it's destructive to your mental and physical health. Instead, it's best to learn how to manage and supplement your diet to the extent that you can within your resources.



## While ingredients may be limited behind bars, your creativity is not.

That usually means replacing some chow hall visits with “home cooking” from the commissary supplies stored in your locker. You have probably already noticed that the all-time best-selling prepared food products in prison commissaries are ramen noodles (or “soups”) and tuna. The noodles are dry; just add hot water. The tuna comes in pouches, so you don't need a can opener. There are many ways to fix the tuna: on crackers, as a sandwich, or added to your ramen noodles. And best of all, tuna—packed in water, not oil—is one of the healthiest foods you will find on either side of prison walls.

Ramen noodle packages are popular wherever hot water is available to cook them. If you decide not to use the accompanying spice package in your soup, consider seasoning other foods with it. While ingredients may be limited behind bars, your creativity is not. Many women in prison have found ways to recreate the tastes they miss and increase the nutritional content of their diets. We recommend asking accomplished prison cooks to share their tips, and further down, we've included some recipes you can try in prison. And yes, we've taste-tested them all!

Many savvy women check the posted prison menu in advance each week and decide which meals they want to replace. Ideally, you will have enough commissary credit to buy the items needed to replace the skipped prison meals. Many commissaries today sell multiple vitamin products. Consider using these daily, not just in prison, but on the outside as well. We seldom get all the needed nutrients through regular eating, no matter how careful we are.

Women have to be particularly careful of certain vitamin deficiencies. According to Harvard Women's Health Watch, women have a hard time getting enough iron, folic acid, Vitamin D, and Vitamin B12. Even if you're eating well, vitamin deficiencies can result during pregnancy, after menopause, or as a result of taking certain medications. Over time, these deficiencies can lead to health problems for you and—if you're pregnant or could become pregnant—your baby.

Tammy Franklin is a former prisoner who oversees the Prison Fellowship Academy® program inside an Oklahoma women's prison where most women can't afford to buy vitamins or shop at the canteen regularly—a situation you might be in, too. Tammy suggests creative alternatives for maintaining a healthy diet instead, like applying—or volunteering—for a job





## Not all drinks are created equal.

as a food service worker. Women who work in prison kitchens often have more options when preparing their meals. Tammy also recommends eating in moderation, watching out for extra calories in the rolls that are typically baked on-site, and turning down seconds if they're offered.

Prison meals are planned to have enough calories for your daily needs. Your first serving is enough, even though you may be tempted to eat more.

In addition to eating as well as you can, make sure you drink plenty of water, especially during the summer, in facilities without air conditioning, or after a workout. Since our bodies are largely water, we need to replace the fluids we lose and flush our systems. But not all drinks are created equal. Some drinks like coffee, tea, soda, and alcohol, are dehydrating. So, fill your cup with water, and make it a lifelong habit.

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### For Those With Special Diets

Just like on the outside, some people in prison require a specialized diet to stay healthy or remain faithful to their religious convictions. A combination of state laws, local policies, and court decisions govern a prison's nutritional standards, so learning what accommodations are available to you is not always straightforward. However, if you truly have special dietary needs, there are some things you can do.

Tammy sometimes sees women cope with special concerns like peanut allergies. She also switched to a vegetarian diet during her own incarceration. Tammy says that the best thing you can do about your dietary needs is to bring them up during the assessment and reception before you enter a prison. Keep in mind that medical exams also include things like blood work and a mental health evaluation. Because medical restrictions are logged and made known to the kitchen officer, it's best to be honest at that first physical exam if you have diabetes, high cholesterol, are pregnant, or have any other condition that affects your diet.

The same goes for religious dietary restrictions. "Let it be known. That way it goes into the medical chart in your file," says Tammy. Raising the issue as early as possible can increase the odds of your request being met, because, unfortunately, special diet exceptions are sometimes exploited by those who may not truly need them.

If you have religious dietary restrictions during Ramadan, Lent, or another special period, you can respectfully make them known to the prison staff. Many will try their best to be helpful, though not all facilities can or will accommodate all restrictions. "Most facilities are so budgeted and on an exact meal plan that it's hard to deviate from it," explains Aly Atwood, a Prison Fellowship volunteer and a former chaplain at a privately run prison. "The kitchen staff couldn't change their schedule to accommodate inmates who were fasting. But we tried to be respectful and helpful during religious holidays."

You may not know about a specific dietary need until you're already in prison. If you find yourself in that situation, contact the medical services

team at your facility about any health-related dietary needs or the chaplain about a religious exception. You may be given a handbook during the intake process at your facility that explains which forms to fill out in these instances and where to find them.

The most important thing to know if you have

a special dietary need is that you will have to be your own advocate on the inside. “We can’t expect the system to take care of us if we’re not willing to take care of ourselves,” Tammy says. If you have a special nutritional need, take ownership and advocate for your health. This is the only life and body you will have. It’s wise to take care of it.

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## Real Prison Recipes From Across the Nation

Past editions of *Inside Journal*, a quarterly newspaper printed and distributed by Prison Fellowship to correctional facilities across the country, have published some of the many recipes that men and women in prison have submitted over the years. These dishes are made using only a microwave and items for sale in a prison commissary. All items or cooking methods might not be available or permitted in your location. Please respect your prison’s regulations.

### GARLIC RANCH CHICKEN ALFREDO

1 (4.5-oz.) pouch ready-to-eat chicken breast  
1 (3-oz.) pkg. ramen noodles  
3 oz. (two 1.5-oz. packets) ranch dressing  
1 oz. (three single-serve packets) mayo  
1 tbsp. garlic  
1 tbsp. dry powder milk  
4 single-serve pepper packets  
13 oz. peas (optional)



#### Directions:

1. Place ramen noodles in large bowl with lid (use only the noodles, not the seasoning packet).
2. Heat 1 large cup (about 20 oz.) water until hot. Add hot water to dry ramen noodles. Cover with lid. Set aside to soak (10 minutes).
3. In a small bowl, mix together ranch, mayo, garlic, pepper, dry powder milk.
4. After ramen noodles have soaked for 10 minutes, drain water, then add sauce (and peas) and mix well. Gently and carefully fold in chicken breast.
5. Heat in microwave until warm. Serve with crackers.

## CHILI CHEESE PIE

1 pkg. (or 15-oz. can) chili with beans  
Seasoning packet from chili-flavored ramen noodles  
3 pkgs. sugar  
Half a bag of corn chips  
1 summer sausage  
Squeeze cheese  
Seasoned salt  
Onion flakes  
1 (8-oz.) block mozzarella cheese, cut up

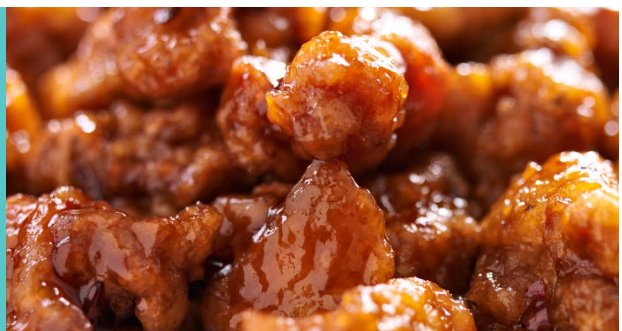


### Directions:

1. Cook chili as directed.
2. Cut up sausage and add to chili mixture.
3. Stir in ramen seasoning, sugar, seasoned salt, and onion flakes.
4. Microwave for two minutes.
5. In a medium bowl, crunch up corn chips and spread out to create a base layer. Top with chili mixture.
6. Melt mozzarella in microwave, then pour onto chili mixture.
7. Top with Squeeze cheese to your liking.

## ORANGE CHICKEN

24 oz. (two 12-oz. pkgs.) chicken, cooked  
1 pkg. rice  
Orange-flavored drink mix  
Soy sauce



### Directions:

1. Cook rice as directed; set aside.
2. Heat chicken.
3. Add 2 scoops of orange-flavored drink mix and soy sauce (to taste) to the chicken.
4. Add a spoonful of hot water and stir together.
5. Microwave for two minutes.
6. Pour orange chicken mixture on top of rice.



## BUFFALO CHICKEN WRAP

6 tortilla shells

1 (8-oz.) pkg. mozzarella cheese, cubed

24 oz. (two 12-oz. pkgs.) chicken, cooked

4 individual serving pouches (approx. 2 oz. each)  
ranch dressing

Hot sauce



### Directions:

1. In medium bowl, combine hot sauce and chicken.
2. Warm tortilla shells for 20 seconds.
3. In each tortilla shell, add chicken mixture, cheese, and ranch dressing. Wrap up by rolling into burrito. Makes six wraps.

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## Can You Get Enough Exercise in Prison?

In prison, it may be tempting to let go of physical exercise. The activities you used to enjoy might be out of reach, you might not be sleeping well in your new environment, and if you're depressed, the temptation to stay in your bunk all day can be overwhelming. However, periods of inactivity could develop into long-term habits that continue into your life after prison.

The human body needs exercise to remain healthy. "Use it or lose it," some say. Our bodies are strongest and healthiest when we force them, through exercise, to work harder than they do at rest.

**There are three different types of useful exercise, and each can be done in prison as well as on the outside.**

1. **Stretching exercises** lengthen the muscles, improve mobility and flexibility, lower the risk of muscle strain, and help with balance.
2. **Resistance exercise** involves lifting, pulling, or pushing against something to build muscle strength. Here's where the weight room comes in, if you are at a prison that still has one. But simpler resistance activities, such as push-ups, sit-ups, bicycling, and even stair climbing, offer muscle-building opportunities.
3. The third type of exercise is **aerobic or endurance training** activities. These get your heart and lungs pumping while exercising other muscles. An ideal aerobic exercise raises your maximum heart rate 50% or more above your normal heart rate and keeps it raised for at least 20 minutes. How can you tell if your heart is pumping hard enough? It's a good sign if you can still have a conversation with a workout buddy, but talking should require a little effort.

## NEED HELP GETTING MOTIVATED?

Choose your inspiration for working out. Select a motivational statement from the list below or create one of your own. Then, write it on a piece of paper and post it where you will see it often as a reminder. Set a goal you can measure and achieve, like, “I will walk around the track 10 times, five days a week, for a month.” Find a workout buddy and set a regular day and time you’ll work out together. You’re less likely to skip if you know someone is waiting for you.

Walking and jogging are aerobic exercises you can do in prison. Try using the track on the rec yard. Better yet, form a walking club. With regular, moderate walking, you can log up to 1,000 miles a year!

Consider using one of the following quotes to motivate you during your next workout:

“”

**Sweat now. Shine later.**

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

“”

**Embrace the uncomfortable to become unstoppable.**

—SARAH JAKES ROBERTS<sup>1</sup>.

“”

**Start where you are.  
Use what you have.  
Do what you can.**

—ARTHUR ASHE<sup>2</sup>.

Even confined to your cell or dorm, you can maintain your physical fitness. Coss Marte came to prison with a significant weight problem. Faced with serious consequences for his health, he developed an in-cell routine that we published in a previous edition of *Inside Journal*. These exercises can be accomplished anywhere, including in a prison cell. (Just make sure to drink plenty of water, and if you haven’t worked out in a while, take care not to hurt yourself!)

### BICYCLE CRUNCH

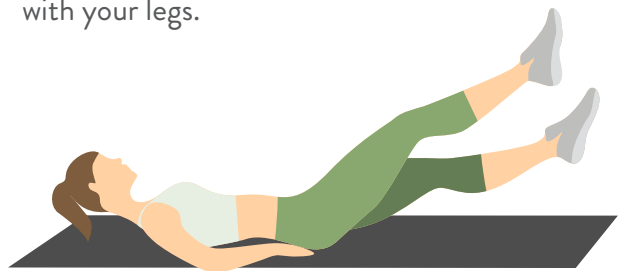
Lie on your back and bring your knees up to form a 90-degree angle. Keep your hands by your temples, crunch up, and twist across the body while kicking your legs in a bicycle motion. (For example, if you crunch up and to the right, you should draw your right knee in.)



Source: ConBody

### FLUTTER KICK

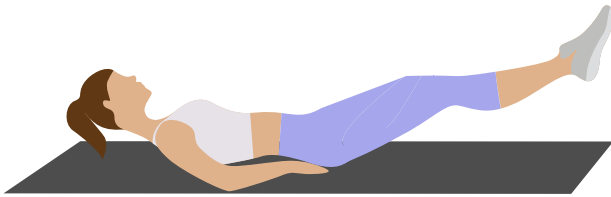
Lie on your back with your arms by your sides and the palms of your hands down. Extend your legs completely out, with knees slightly bent. Lift your heels about six inches off the floor. Make small, rapid, up-and-down scissor-like motions with your legs.



Source: ConBody

## HELLO DOLLY/SCISSOR KICK

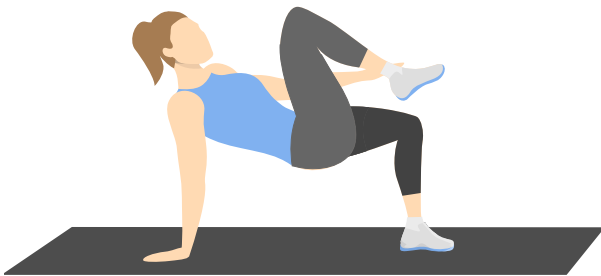
Lie back and keep your legs together. Extend your legs out and point your toes toward the ceiling. Slide your hands, palms down, under your tailbone. Keep your head back and your chin tucked. Using your core strength, lift your feet six inches off the floor. Separate your legs horizontally as far as you can and begin a horizontal scissor kick, back and forth.



Source: ConBody

## CRAB TOE TOUCH

Sit on the floor with knees bent and feet together. Place your hands behind you. Lift your hips off the floor, kick your right leg up, and touch your right foot with your left hand. Then place your right foot on the floor, kick your left leg up, and touch your left foot with your right hand. Keep alternating legs quickly, keeping your core engaged and your neck relaxed.



## In Summary

Getting the proper diet and exercise is important to your well-being. After all, what you do to your body and put into your body matters. Even with limited resources, you can thrive when you commit to a self-care regimen and incorporate a little creativity.

Although you may try recipes adapted for prison cooks, take strolls around the track, or advocate for your special dietary needs, your holistic well-being doesn't stop there. Why? You may be one of the many women in prison who is also recovering from substance abuse, trauma, or other complex issues. In the next sections, you'll find tips and resources that promote a healthier lifestyle—both now as you continue your sentence and, if release is in your future, on the outside.

## End Notes

1. Sarah Jakes Roberts is an author, businesswoman, and media personality. She and her husband, Touré Roberts, co-pastor The Potter's House (Los Angeles and Denver campuses). Roberts's quote is taken from the back cover of her book, *Don't Settle for Safe: Embracing the Uncomfortable to Become Unstoppable*. Learn more at [sarahjakesroberts.com](http://sarahjakesroberts.com).
2. The late Arthur Ashe was an American professional tennis player. The statement quoted here is similar to one that is attributed to Theodore Roosevelt: "Do what you can, with what you've got, where you are." However, in the book, *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography*, Roosevelt credits a layperson, Squire Bill Widener, instead. Visit this URL for additional details: [suebrewton.com/tag/do-what-you-can-with-what-you-have-where-you-are](http://suebrewton.com/tag/do-what-you-can-with-what-you-have-where-you-are).





**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**Recovering from Substance  
Abuse and Addiction Issues**

## CHAPTER TWO

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We've all made a rash, unwise, or embarrassing decision at some point. Some choices are more reckless than others. Those involving substance abuse and other addictions can place people in harm's way. Perhaps they also cost you your freedom. When this happens, you might be tempted to think that you're the worst wife, mom, daughter, or friend to ever enter a prison cell.

Don't. You are not defined by your worst decisions. Most women alongside you are going through the same thing.<sup>1</sup> This is not the end of your story. Instead, if you start taking steps toward recovery, it can be your turning point.

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## Using Incarceration as an Opportunity to Deal With Addiction

Prison can be a tough place to manage your addiction. You might not have a lot of resources where you are, but this chapter offers insight, help, and practical tools. Stay encouraged!

Your time behind bars doesn't have to be the worst experience of your life. Tammy Franklin, a former prisoner who oversees the [Prison Fellowship Academy®](#) inside an Oklahoma women's prison, suggests that this time could be your best. She says, "Look at this time as a gift. Use this time to see how to overcome the hurdles that brought [you] here in the first place." Recognize that your issues—especially addictions—are rooted in some deeper need.



**Look at this time as a gift. Use this time to see how to overcome the hurdles that brought [you] here in the first place.**

### YOU'D BETTER RECOGNIZE

Once you recognize the source of your addiction, you can use your time behind bars for self-improvement, without concerning yourself with things like rent, utilities, or transportation. You may never again have this amount of time to focus solely on yourself. Tammy notes that this

may also be the first time in years that you feel guilt or shame for your actions, because you've probably spent much of your life trying to hide those emotions.

By now, you might be ready to face your addiction. But be warned: A lot of heavy emotional weight accompanies getting clean. You might begin to recall the times you've hurt your children, stolen, lied, or stayed with an abusive person—all because of your addiction. But you don't have to be that person forever; you can change.

Acknowledging your addiction is admirable, but it's equally important to remember your strengths and consider your potential. Prison can be the place where you learn to view yourself, your situation, and your time through a different, healthy lens. It's all about perspective. Are you ready to shift your focus?

### WHY REFRAME?

When your situation seems impossible to fix, it's probably because you are thinking about potential outcomes that are unrealistic, untrue, unhealthy, or unhelpful. Your thinking is stuck. Instead, consider ways to view your scenario from a different angle—one that's empowering. That doesn't mean you ignore the severity of your circumstance. But it does require that you consider your situation from a more positive stance.

This technique is called "reframing." Reframing matters because it helps you change your outlook, cultivate self-compassion, and cut out bitterness. What does reframing look like? Check out the examples below. Then, think of how you might reframe a few worst-case scenarios that replay in your mind.



NEGATIVE THOUGHT	REFRAMED THOUGHT
<i><b>I don't see how I'll ever thrive in this environment.</b></i>	If I can't change my environment, I can change my attitude about it. I can start by checking out helpful books in the library, visiting the chapel, and asking my case manager about programs that are available to me. <sup>2</sup>
<i><b>No one will ever hire me upon reentry.</b></i>	Finding employment after prison may be challenging, but I can use my time behind bars to prepare for my release, gain new skills, and make it easier for someone to hire me.
<i><b>This diagnosis and treatment will be unbearable.</b></i>	I can cooperate with medical professionals and focus on living the healthiest life possible—one day at a time.
<i><b>Who would ever love me?</b></i>	Some men will not consider dating a woman with my past. And some people won't be ready to look past what I've done. That's OK. I can use my prison sentence to learn how to love myself, improve myself, and develop healthy relationships with the people God puts around me.

## Understanding Addiction as a Holistic Problem

Now is a good time to consider how your addiction affects every aspect of your life. After all, addictions are holistic problems. They're harmful to your entire well-being—mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual.

Perhaps an addiction isn't the only problem you're dealing with. Women are more likely to enter prison with a history of physical and sexual abuse. Women are also more likely to endure additional abuse while incarcerated.<sup>3</sup> Problems like these often intertwine. They feed on each other—abuse and trauma leading to addiction and more trauma, until they build into a life-controlling tangle of brokenness.

## BROKENNESS

Many women find that brokenness is at the root of an addiction. Can you relate?

Rhonda Bear can. As a program director for Stand in the Gap Ministries, Rhonda prepares women for reentry into the community after their incarceration. According to the organization's [website](#), Rhonda once struggled with substance abuse and attempted suicide. After she experienced childhood abandonment, she continued this cycle with her own children and eventually spent time in prison.

Rhonda was released from prison in 2002, but she still remembers her traumatic past and the lies she believed while she was behind bars—lies that told her she wasn't pretty enough, smart enough, or good enough to deserve love.

She believes that those lies were behind her addiction—and that replacing lies with the truth put her on the path to recovery. She shares, “I think if we could address the lie that people live, about not being enough, maybe we could heal the addiction, and therefore, we could heal the family.”

### TYPES OF ADDICTIONS

When you think about addiction, substance abuse typically comes to mind. When you need to fill a void in your life, drugs are one of several dangerous options. Rhonda has seen other addictions as well: excessive shopping, codependent relationships, and people pleasing. You might also resort to gambling or overeating when you’re emotionally empty. But addictions usually spring from the same place. “Addiction is broad,” Rhonda says, “but if you trace it back, normally at the bridge there’s a deep hurt. There’s a trauma.”

### WHO’S AFFECTED?

Entire families experience the effects of addiction and incarceration. Your parents and siblings might be hurting. If you have kids of your own, you and your children’s caregiver may have feelings of resentment as you coparent. Your teenage children may mimic your addictive behaviors, struggle with unforgiveness, or even blame themselves for your addiction. Perhaps your younger children are confused about their new living arrangement. They might suffer with depression or anger. Maybe they act out in school.

Robyn and her family experienced some of these problems. As a child, Robyn was neglected and

sexually abused. She became addicted to meth at the age of 15 while she was homeless. By the time she was 24 years old, she was the mother of four children. Although she went to prison and got clean, she later relapsed while she had custody of her two youngest children. “The kids were a mess,” Robyn admits. “They spent a lot of time with friends and living on the street. ... It was painful to see them making the same bad choices I made.”



**Although an addiction can feel like a life-long sentence, it doesn’t have to be.**

There are ways you can work to heal relationships with your children while incarcerated. One of them, [Prison Fellowship Angel Tree™](#), strengthens relationships between incarcerated parents and their children by supporting the families of prisoners year-round through gift-giving, camping experiences, mentoring opportunities, and more. Because Robyn’s family participated in [Angel Tree® Christmas](#), church volunteers gave her children gifts at Christmastime on her behalf. Using the resources available to her, Robyn aimed to improve her relationship with her children. Check with the chaplain at your institution to see if Angel Tree is available.

## Consequences of Addiction

If you are ready to get serious about your recovery, this can be a great time to make progress. Still, you'll face temptations. So, it's important to know about the additional consequences you'll endure if you yield to your addiction while you're behind bars.

When you're in prison, your community may be like the one you left on the outside. You could be pressured to buy or sell drugs, participate in sexually promiscuous acts, or gather into a small huddle to share a single contraband cigarette. We all have a natural tendency to drift toward what's familiar—even when it's destructive.

An addictive lifestyle may be all you know. Continuing that lifestyle in prison could result in serious consequences: diseases, 23-hour lockdowns and isolation, or an unhealthy body weight. You might also lose privileges like shopping at the canteen or receiving visits from family.

Recalling her own experience behind bars, Annie Goebel, a Prison Fellowship women's ministry leader, advises women not to put themselves in

compromising situations. She says that you might think one of your peers on the inside is showing kindness by offering you drugs. If you accept her offer, though, you could become indebted to her as your provider. Abuse often follows.

Instead of making decisions like these that could cost you your health, further restrict your freedom, and hurt your relationships, Tammy suggests pausing to think about the many options available to you. You might believe that while you're completing your sentence, most of your decisions will be made for you or that you don't have a voice. Although you've made some poor choices in the past, that doesn't mean you can't advocate for yourself now. So, let go of those self-defeating mindsets and remain hopeful.

## Restoring Hope

The consequences of your addiction may seem hard to bear, but don't lose hope. Although an addiction can feel like a life-long sentence, it doesn't have to be. Allow other women's success stories to empower you with the hope of restoration.



## SUCCESS STORIES



**Teresa** started drinking alcohol at age 12, and by age 17, she was also addicted to drugs. She was in and out of jail, treatment centers, and prison. She gave birth to her daughter while behind bars and entrusted her infant to her mother's care. Teresa prayed for healing, started attending church services at the prison chapel, and eventually joined [Celebrate Recovery Inside](#). In this faith-based, 12-step recovery program offered behind bars, she found support, learned skills to help her stay sober, and began to heal. In 2011, Teresa was released from prison and reunited with her family. She now works as a full-time field director for Prison Fellowship, and in the summer of 2020, she celebrated 10 years sober. Check out the full story in the [Summer 2020 women's edition of Inside Journal](#)®.



**Serena** grew up as a biracial child in a mostly white town in South Dakota. She experienced racism in her family and in her community. She was abused by her uncle and never knew her father. By her mid-20s, Serena had three daughters and supported them through drug trafficking. This landed her in prison at the age of 27. Her daughters were separated and lived with extended family. But everything changed when Serena started going to the prison chapel, reading the Bible, and building healthy friendships. Serena served two years in prison. Now, she volunteers with Celebrate Recovery and Prison Fellowship. She and her daughters enjoy volunteering with Angel Tree Christmas. For Serena's full story, check out the [Summer 2019 women's edition of Inside Journal](#).



**Anh** began drinking alcohol while she was in middle school, and after being molested by a relative, she started drinking more to numb her hurt and confusion. Anh slept around and was introduced to gambling. She went to prison for her involvement in a criminal deal that went badly and resulted in a man's death. Then, she began reading the Bible. Anh also enrolled in [The Urban Ministry Institute \(TUMI\)](#), an intensive biblical studies program offered by Prison Fellowship in conjunction with World Impact. During her enrollment, she learned Christian leadership skills. After her release, she eventually secured a career as a counselor. "You have to understand what happened to you in order to heal," Anh says. "You're not just existing here on this Earth to take space. I want to be able to share my strength and hope with other people, through what Christ has done for me." Read Anh's entire story in the [Winter 2020 women's edition of Inside Journal](#).

## HOW DID THESE WOMEN DO IT?

Lasting success doesn't happen accidentally. It requires planning, determination, and hard work. Below are a few practical tips from successful women like Teresa, Serena, and Anh, who have been where you are right now and have experienced restoration.

- Find others on the road to recovery in a Celebrate Recovery or 12-step group. Read the Bible and attend chapel services. Seek [prison ministry programs](#) that are available to you at your facility. When you do, you'll find support from people who will hold you accountable. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.
- Make healthy habits to replace unhealthy ones. Consider going for a walk instead of drinking an alcoholic drink. Write in a journal instead of smoking a cigarette.
- Forgive yourself and believe in your ability to change.
- Start a hobby to keep your mind sharp and your mood pleasant.

Which of the above tips can you practice this week? Remember, all progress must start somewhere. Even tiny steps will move you closer to your goal.

## Coping Strategies That Help With Recovery

You've heard other women's success stories, but how will you begin your road to recovery? Rhonda suggests that transparency and honesty are important. Borrowing from a slogan used in Alcoholics Anonymous, she says, "You're only as sick as your secret." Secrets only prolong your recovery and healing. It's best to own up to your bad choices so that you can begin coping with your addiction in healthy ways. When you release your shame and guilt, you'll make room for something beautiful to happen: recovery.

## THE ART OF COPING WITH SHAME AND GUILT

Art helps with recovery by allowing women to process their emotions in a nonthreatening manner. The exercise below, "Making Emotions Into Art," is an activity that's similar in purpose to those taught in [Create: New Beginnings®](#), a series of restorative, faith-centered, art-based workshops offered by Prison Fellowship. This activity involves drawing a mandala—a circular diagram with repetitive patterns and shapes throughout.

While drawing your mandala, try praying, meditating, or reflecting on a Bible verse. You could also focus on a single word and its significance to you.

## Making Emotions Into Art (Featuring Artist Stephanie Logan Segel)

[WATCH THE VIDEO HERE](#)

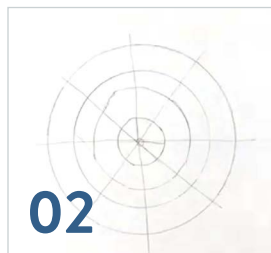
### Supplies

- Pencil
- Pen
- Paper
- Colored Pencils (optional)

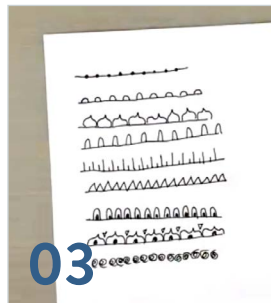
### Directions:



Using a pencil, draw a circle in the center of your paper. This will be the largest of several circles you will draw. It doesn't need to be perfect. You can trace the base of a round object. Draw a smaller circle centered inside the first one. Draw an even smaller circle in the center of the last circle you drew. Continue this process to create as many circles as you'd like.



Next, divide your circles into sections. Use a straight edge if desired. These lines will serve as guides for filling in your mandala.



Once you're satisfied with your layout, determine which patterns you'll use to build your mandala. Some of the most common shapes are below.

- Line and dots
- Circles
- Petals
- Big Petals
- Lines
- Triangles
- Combine shapes to create an intricate pattern



Start from the center and build the mandala outward using combinations of different sizes of lines, dots, circles, triangles, and petals. Fill in the space with whatever you desire, using the basic shapes as a starting point.



You may leave the completed mandala as is or use colored pencils to fill in the shapes. If you decide to add color, select shades that represent your emotions. Refer to the sample chart below. While you fill in your mandala, allow this to be a time of reflection to process feelings of shame and guilt as you draw—or color—one shape at a time.



## QUIZ:

# TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ON WEIGHT GAIN AND RECOVERY.

Approximately what percentage of people in addiction recovery experience weight gain?

- A) 25%
- B) 45%
- C) 65%

**Answer: C) 65%.**

Nearly two-thirds of people in addiction recovery gain weight. This is normal and healthy. Remember, you might have mistreated your body for several months or years. As you prioritize your recovery, you may be uncomfortable with your appearance—especially if you’re no longer getting compliments for having a slim figure. But returning to drugs isn’t a good option. Recognize this trigger when it surfaces. Learn to love your body as it heals. Try changing your eating habits or exercising instead. (For more on diet and exercise while behind bars, see [Chapter 1](#).) You deserve to get better!

## IDENTIFYING TRIGGERS AND COPING WITH CRAVINGS

Dealing with shame and trauma from your past is critical in overcoming addiction. You will also need to navigate your triggers. A trigger is anything that causes you to remember a previous traumatic experience, and in turn, have a strong emotional reaction that has you running to your addiction. Consider making a list of triggers you’ve experienced. When you know what they are, you can usually make plans to avoid them or deal with them in a healthier way. Common triggers include:

- Stress
- Boredom
- Financial or relational problems
- Anger
- People, places, sights, sounds, or smells linked to your trauma or your addiction
- Old habits linked to your addiction

## MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Sometimes, you’ll need strategies to cope with triggers that are unavoidable, especially since triggers can lead to cravings. One method that can help you cope with cravings is to practice mindfulness meditation. Instead of trying to fight the cravings, you learn to let yourself feel the emotions and physical sensations of the craving, without spiraling into feelings of shame. Try repeating these words three times while paying attention to your breathing: “May I be filled with love and kindness. May I be safe. May I be well. May I be peaceful and happy.”<sup>4</sup>

Mindfulness teaches you to focus on what is happening around you in the moment. You focus on what you’re doing, whom you’re with, where you are, and what you’re feeling. Try this exercise without making any judgments. Focus on the facts instead.



## GROUNDING

Grounding is another technique in mindfulness. It can be used to help to reduce anxiety.

These are [five steps of grounding](#) that you can practice when you're feeling stressed and anxious:

- Look for five things that you can see around you.
- Find four things you can touch around you. Pay attention to the way they feel.
- Listen for three things you can hear around you.
- Pay attention to two things you can smell around you.
- Find one thing you can taste around you.

End this exercise with a long, deep breath. Inhale through your mouth slowly while counting to five, and then, exhale slowly through your mouth while counting to five. Focusing your senses on what's around you helps you gain self-awareness and helps you push out unhealthy thoughts. Both can make it easier for you to avoid a relapse.

## Relapses

Triggers lead to cravings, and cravings can lead to relapses. A relapse begins long before you pick up a drink or a drug. There are three stages of relapse: emotional relapse, mental relapse, and physical relapse.

### EMOTIONAL RELAPSES

Emotional relapse, the first step in a return to addiction, happens when you stop processing life's daily stresses in a healthy, self-nurturing way. Though you might not even realize it at the time, emotions and stress begin to overwhelm

you, leaving you vulnerable to the allure of a quick fix. You might be experiencing an emotional relapse if you exhibit behaviors like these:

- Regularly avoiding others' company—including close family and friends.
- Skipping rehabilitative group meetings, not sharing in these meetings, or bottling up your emotions in general.
- Focusing on other people's problems.
- Neglecting to eat well, sleep well, or exercise your body.
- Dodging responsibilities.

These are all examples of poor self-care. Self-care is concerned with how you nurture yourself emotionally, mentally, and physically. It is important to recovery and to staying healthy.

The HALT method helps you determine how well you're caring for yourself. It involves stopping to ask yourself whether you're hungry, angry, lonely, or tired—factors that affect your total well-being. It isn't selfish or wrong to do healthy activities that you enjoy and that make you happy. They are part of good emotional self-care.

Look at the things you're doing and how you're feeling now. Compare them to the things you did and how you felt during your addiction. If you see that you are starting to act and feel the same as you did during those times, try improving your self-care habits. Even little steps can help steer you away from addiction and back toward the fulfilling life you want and deserve.

### MENTAL RELAPSES

Whether you're on the inside or recently released, a mental relapse can happen if you don't take good care of your physical and emotional needs. You may feel irritable, uncomfortable,

restless, or like you need to escape. You're experiencing mental relapse when you struggle between wanting and not wanting to use. As your struggle continues, your need for an escape grows until you finally give in. Signs of a mental relapse can include the following:

- Reminiscing about the people you used to do drugs with or the places you used to go when you did drugs.
- Craving drugs and alcohol or thinking that life was more fun when it included those things.
- Convincing yourself that you're in control of your addiction, and then lying to a mentor who asks about your progress.
- Planning your relapse or looking for opportunities to relapse.
- Habitually making excuses and justifying your desire to use "just this once."

To avoid a mental relapse, it's important to learn how to steer clear of high-risk places or people. It is not a sign of weakness to step away from the voices luring you back into addiction. Instead, you're making a good decision—one that will keep you healthy.

Sometimes, the voice you need to disregard is your own. Avoid justifying addictive habits by



**You don't have to be perfect; you just have to make the choice to change.**

telling yourself things like, "It's OK if I'm just having one drink," or "I'm only taking the drugs when I'm in pain." Swapping one addiction for another isn't healthy either. Switching from drugs to alcohol or from gambling to overeating only complicates your recovery process.

Occasionally having thoughts about using drugs is normal in early substance abuse recovery. However, when you start having these thoughts more frequently and have difficulty letting go of them, pay attention. These thoughts are warning flags of mental relapse.

### PHYSICAL RELAPSE

Physical relapse occurs when you restart your addictive behavior again. It happens because you're already in a bad place emotionally and mentally. So, when an opportunity surfaces, you're likely to surrender to your desire, especially if you believe you won't get caught. Once you've gone through emotional and mental relapse, you are incredibly vulnerable to taking this last step.

You might be teetering on the edge of a physical relapse if you're having thoughts like these:

- *I can hang out with my friends while they're smoking or gambling. I don't plan to participate. Besides, they're fun to be around. They make me laugh.*
- *People won't like me—and perhaps, I won't like myself—if I don't use drugs.*
- *I can't change all the things I need to change to stay clean.*
- *Staying sober is too much work.*
- *I'm afraid that I've already done too much damage. I can't recover.*

## RELAPSE AND OVERDOSING.

Relapsing is a common occurrence in recovery. However, for some people, it poses a life-threatening situation resulting in hospitalization, coma, or death. If you've been in recovery and suddenly begin using again, your body can't tolerate the same amount of the drug as before. To complicate matters, many drugs are now being laced or cut with synthetic opioids. This makes them more potent and more dangerous—even deadly. Honor your treatment plan like your life depends on it, because it just might.

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## AFTER RELAPSE

If you do slide back into addiction, what happens next? You might believe that a relapse negates all your recovery efforts. Perhaps you doubt it's even worthwhile to keep trying. But that's not true. Many people who are living in recovery today had setbacks on the journey. So don't waste time beating yourself up. Negative self-talk only triggers more addictive behavior. You don't have to be perfect; you just have to make the choice to change. Keep improving. Learn from your relapses. Forgive yourself. Trust God to help you heal.

## Reentry

Relapses can happen inside prison, but even greater challenges await as you prepare for reentry. Be encouraged, though. Others have transitioned back into the free world well, and you can too. Finding a supportive community and leaving behind the people and places that trapped you in addiction are both key.

So, too, is learning to give back. You are more than your addiction. You have a lot to offer the world! Community involvement can give you a sense of purpose, whether it's volunteering at church, helping the homeless, or mentoring other women who are starting their own journey in recovery. The more you are involved in your community, the less likely you are to relapse into unhealthy behaviors.

For more on reentry, check out this Prison Fellowship resource, "[Get Out and Stay Out: A Reentry Guide](#)," or [click here](#) to read about other helpful organizations and programs.

## Resources

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
<a href="#"><u>Alcoholics Anonymous</u></a>	Alcoholics Anonymous is a 12-step program in which men and women share their experience, strength, and hope to help one another recover from alcoholism.
<a href="#"><u>Celebrate Recovery</u></a>	Celebrate Recovery is a 12-step, Christ-centered program based on eight recovery principles that helps people break free of addictive and compulsive behaviors.
<a href="#"><u>Create: New Beginnings</u></a>	Through individual and group sessions, Create: New Beginnings is a restorative art program offered by Prison Fellowship. It empowers women to acknowledge critical emotions and develop self-awareness through artistic expression.
<a href="#"><u>Floodlight™</u></a>	Through this new program, Prison Fellowship offers digital inspirational and educational content to prisons across the country. It is accessible via tablets, closed circuit television, and more.
<a href="#"><u>Hope Event™</u></a>	Prison Fellowship Hope Events introduce prisoners to the hope of Jesus Christ through yard events featuring inspirational speakers, musicians, and other attractions.
<a href="#"><u>Inside Journal</u></a>	Inside Journal is a quarterly newspaper printed and distributed by Prison Fellowship to correctional facilities across the country. It offers inspirational stories, encouragement, and hope in Jesus. It is offered in a men's edition, a women's edition, and a Spanish-language edition.
<a href="#"><u>Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible</u></a>	<p>Inside Journal partners with Tyndale House Publishers to offer the Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible for free to prisoners who request them by mail. Write to the address below to receive your copy. Include your name, prison ID number, facility name, facility address, and preference of English or Spanish. Limit one Bible per person.</p> <p><b>Tyndale House Publishers</b>            Attn: Inside Journal Bible            351 Executive Drive            Carol Stream, IL 60188</p>



<a href="#"><u>Narcotics Anonymous</u></a>	Narcotics Anonymous is a 12-step program and network of support groups for recovering drug addicts. It is open to all, regardless of the drug(s) used.
<a href="#"><u>Prison Fellowship Academy</u></a>	Prison Fellowship Academy uses curriculum, coaches, and restorative community in a year-long program that replaces negative mindsets with biblically based life principles. Graduates of the program are groomed to be good citizens whether in prison or on the outside.
<a href="#"><u>Prison Fellowship Angel Tree</u></a>	<p>Prison Fellowship Angel Tree strengthens relationships between incarcerated parents and their children and supports the families of prisoners year-round. It comprises the following efforts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Angel Tree Christmas</b>—Prison Fellowship partners with local churches and community organizations to give children a gift, the Gospel message, and a personal message of love on behalf of their parent.</li> <li>• <b>Angel Tree camping</b>—Prison Fellowship partners with churches and camps nationwide and provides scholarships for children with parents in prison.</li> <li>• <b>Angel Tree sports camps</b>—Prison Fellowship partners with churches and professional athletic organizations to help children with parents in prison hear the Gospel and receive life lessons from top-tier athletes.</li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>The Salvation Army</u></a>	Prison Fellowship's partnership with The Salvation Army of California allows returning citizens who are currently or were formerly enrolled in Prison Fellowship's in-prison programming to utilize The Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Center residential program. (This is a pilot program that may expand to other areas of the U.S.)
<a href="#"><u>The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI)</u></a>	TUMI is an intensive biblical studies course offered by Prison Fellowship in conjunction with World Impact. It teaches and equips prisoners to become Christian leaders in prisons and in the urban communities to which many of them will return. Graduates of the program have been recognized as leaders in their correctional institutions and have made positive transitions back into their communities as spouses, parents, employees, and urban missionaries.

## In Summary

Substance abuse and other addictions stem from brokenness and cause harsh consequences. You might have watched your relationships, children, health, and career suffer because of your addiction. You probably have guilt and shame, too. In short, addiction negatively affects your life and the lives of those around you.

There is hope for you. In this chapter you've learned skills to nurture yourself and get on the path to recovery. You've seen examples of women who have made it to the other side of the prison fence, leading full, transformed lives beyond addiction. Hopefully, their stories will inspire you to make healthy changes, and the tools in this chapter will help on your road to recovery.

If you're dealing with mental health issues alongside your addiction, the next chapter includes a section that was designed with your situation in mind. It also covers other health issues that you may face while incarcerated.

## End Notes

1. According to a 2015 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, "[Prisoners in 2015](#)," nearly 60% of women whose sentences exceed one year are serving time in federal prisons for drug-related offenses. The good news: Even though you may be one of them, it's not too late to make a fresh start.
2. Tips in this reframed thought are courtesy of Tammy Franklin who oversees the [Prison Fellowship Academy](#) inside an Oklahoma women's prison.
3. Ervin, Storm et al. "Addressing Trauma and Victimization in Women's Prisons: Trauma-Informed Victim Services and Programs for Incarcerated Women." Urban Institute. 2020. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103017/addressing-trauma-and-victimization-in-womens-prisons-trauma-informed-victim-services-and-programs-for-incarcerated-women\\_3.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103017/addressing-trauma-and-victimization-in-womens-prisons-trauma-informed-victim-services-and-programs-for-incarcerated-women_3.pdf). pp. 3, 4. Accessed on February 16, 2021.
4. Jack Kornfield has taught meditation since 1974. This is an adaptation of one of Kornfield's mantras published at <https://jackkornfield.com/meditation-lovingkindness/>. Accessed on April 26, 2021.

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## CHAPTER THREE:

# Women's Health Issues



## CHAPTER THREE

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No one wants to get sick. But when you do, the good news is, whether you have the flu or a chronic condition like diabetes, medical care is available to you in prison. It's your constitutional right.

As a woman, you have unique medical and physical needs. In this chapter, we'll discuss some of them to help you know what you can realistically expect from prison health care. You only have one body, and it's up to you to seek the best care you can access despite being behind bars. Don't let your fears or distrust of people in authority, including medical professionals, keep you from getting the care you deserve.

### DISCLAIMER

The content in this guide is for informational and educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical, psychological, or legal advice. Please consult the appropriate entity (e.g., medical professional, healthcare provider, or attorney) if you are seeking advice, a diagnosis, or a treatment plan. Neither Prison Fellowship® nor its employees are responsible for the risks or issues associated with using or acting upon the information in this guide.

## PRESERVING YOUR SMILE

After several months waiting to see a dentist, you could need major dental work by the time you get to recline in a dentist's chair. But state funding is limited in most facilities. Consequently, tooth extractions have become a common dental treatment. If you have several teeth removed, your facility may not be able to supply you with dentures. Instead, they may offer a soft-food diet.

Missing teeth not only complicate life behind bars, but they also add to the challenges of reentry. However, this doesn't have to be your experience. With good oral hygiene, you may be able to preserve your smile.

How many of these tips can you start incorporating into your routine?

- Brush for about two minutes with a fluoride toothpaste twice daily.
- Replace your toothbrush every three to four months or when the bristles lose their shape, whichever occurs first.
- Floss daily.
- Drink water frequently throughout the day.
- Limit your consumption of sugary foods and beverages.

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## Making the Most of Prison Health Care

Before your incarceration, perhaps you avoided visits to the doctor because you didn't have health insurance, and medical care seemed unaffordable. Maybe you were concerned about receiving a diagnosis you didn't want. You might have assumed doctors wouldn't listen to you; they would ask too many embarrassing questions, or they would judge you.

If you've struggled with substance abuse, a thorough medical exam is a good idea. You've neglected your health. Once you're no longer in addiction, you suddenly become aware of aches and pains you hadn't previously noticed. Although pain can be a nuisance, it alerts you to some deeper issue you can address while you're behind bars.

### GOOD HEALTH STARTS WITH A HEALTHY MINDSET

Now is a good time to embrace healthy mindsets and behaviors so you can be your best self. Chanda Robinson, a program counselor for Prison Fellowship Academy® at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in Oklahoma and a former prisoner, says: "We've got to do better, but it all starts [in the mind], because if I don't change my mind, I'm not going to change the way I live."

One way to embrace a healthy mindset is to take advantage of preventive care like physicals, immunizations, dental cleanings, and screenings for cancer. Services like these are available at many facilities. Just make sure you request them and then keep your appointments. If you miss a scheduled doctor's visit, your failure to show will be recorded. If you want to reschedule, you'll need to initiate that process yourself.

And timely appointments with some doctors, especially dentists, are difficult to get. You could

be on a waitlist for months (or years in some states) for a cleaning. If you're in pain, though, speak up! Fill out a form to request to speak to a staff member. Ensure you are seen, heard, and cared for. You're worth this extra effort.

## PHYSICIANS, PRESCRIPTIONS, AND PERSISTENCE

Prisons typically have on-site doctors who care for chronic diseases and mental health professionals who can help you manage disorders like depression or anxiety. Some prisons offer on-site nursing homes, and a few, [3.75%](#), even offer hospice services. Find out which types of care and services are available at your facility, and then, make plans to use them when needed.

Although a variety of medicines and treatment regimens are offered at your facility, you may be prescribed Tylenol or ibuprofen initially. According to an Oklahoma Department of Corrections nurse, more potent pain medications are typically reserved for women who live in the medical ward.

Pain medicines can be hard on the liver, especially if you've taken them with alcohol or you've taken more than the recommended

dose. Still, some women want something stronger, especially women who have a history of substance abuse. As a result, an intricate decision-making process may be implemented for prescribing medications. Physicians may consider alternative therapies, a drug's benefit to the patient, and how it might compromise the system if used inappropriately as contraband. So, you may not get the drug you were hoping for on your first visit.

If you follow the prescribed treatment plan and realize your condition isn't improving, continue to speak up for yourself. Be persistent, be patient, and follow your facility's procedures to make sure you get your health issues addressed as quickly as possible.

However, there will be times when ibuprofen is exactly what you'll need, especially if you have a history of severe menstrual cramps. Chanda recommends getting this documented during the intake process. Good documentation and communication are vital in getting what you need in prison. (For more on the prison intake process and the types of concerns you should reveal during this time—like special dietary requirements—read [Chapter 1](#).)

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## Feminine Hygiene

Sometimes menstrual cramping won't be your only concern during your cycle. You may also experience heavy bleeding. This presents one of several hygienic issues you could face during your period, because feminine supplies are limited in some state prisons.

Running out of maxi pads is an embarrassment. If you soil your clothes, you might not be able to wash them until your designated laundry day.

And, if you decide to wear a maxi pad multiple times, beware. The adhesive loses its stickiness.

Here's what you can do instead:

- Because your cycle is a monthly occurrence, try creating a commissary spending plan that includes an allowance for maxi pads. Stock up beforehand if you have the money on your account.
- If you have a support system on the outside, ask these people to contribute money to

- your commissary account for your monthly feminine needs. This may be an embarrassing but necessary task.
- Ask your chaplain whether local churches or other organizations can donate feminine products.
- Ask your case manager or medical department for extra feminine supplies.

Getting brand-new undergarments can be complicated too. Items provided by the state are likely to be used or of the most basic quality.

Teresa,\* a full-time field director for Prison Fellowship® and former prisoner, had family members who were able to send her extra panties, socks, and other items once or twice each year in accordance with prison regulations. They also added money to her commissary account.

Truth be told, the struggles you could face behind bars during your cycle might cause you

to feel powerless and have feelings of shame or humiliation. When you feel like you've lost your dignity, consider the resilience and strength you have instead. Think about the power you have when you use your voice. Dream about and hope for a better tomorrow.

Allow these quotations to inspire you:

**“Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it” (Psalm 139:14, NLT).**

**“A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult.” –Melinda Gates, an American businesswoman and philanthropist**

**“You get in life what you have the courage to ask for.” –Oprah Winfrey, a TV personality, philanthropist, and entrepreneur**

**“You cannot have those things you refuse to dream of.”<sup>1</sup> –Stacey Abrams, a Georgia-based politician, voting rights activist, and novelist**



## **Pregnancy and Childbirth While Incarcerated**

Inspiration was exactly what Teresa needed. Young and pregnant, she had made bad decisions that landed her a spot in a county jail. While behind bars, she went into labor, was transported to the hospital, and gave birth to a baby girl. After spending 48 hours with her newborn, she was taken back to jail.

When Teresa's family brought her daughter for visits, a glass panel separated them. Six months passed before she transferred to a prison where visitation was handled differently. There, she could hold her baby during visits. She kept

thinking of ways she could be a good mother. Teresa's love for her infant daughter empowered her to turn her life around. To learn more about Teresa's life transformation, read her success story in [Chapter 2](#).

Teresa's experience shows how pregnancy and childbirth during a prison sentence is quite different from a pregnancy on the outside. But the differences don't stop there. During labor and delivery, an armed corrections officer will accompany you into the birthing room (or wait outside the room). And, if you are considered a safety or escape concern, the officer may restrain you during your transport to the hospital and during labor. Like Teresa, you may also

*\*Last name withheld for privacy*

## THE FIRST STEP ACT: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

You may have heard about the [FIRST STEP Act \(FSA\)](#) President Donald Trump signed on December 21, 2018, but you aren't sure about all the buzz it has created and how it might apply to you.

The [FSA](#) deals with several aspects of prison reform. However, it applies to federal prisons as opposed to [state and county facilities](#) where most women tend to be incarcerated. As a woman, you may be especially interested in a couple of its provisions:

- If you are pregnant, in labor, and incarcerated, the FSA protects you from being restrained unless you are deemed a threat or a flight risk.
- It also requires the Bureau of Prisons to provide you with free tampons and maxi pads when you need them.

This is indeed a step in the right direction. You may be happy to learn that [more than half](#) of all states have passed legislation that either limits or completely bans restraining incarcerated women who are in labor.

experience separation from your baby once you are taken back to prison.

The good news: Some states have programs that help new mothers stay with their babies for a portion of their sentence. Wardens and agencies nationwide are stepping up as change agents. They're determining creative methods to honor the needs of women from pregnancy through postpartum, including ways to accommodate mother-baby bonding experiences—all while maintaining safety.

The Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, Ohio, has a long-standing nursery program that exemplifies this type of innovation. Its [Achieving Baby Care Success \(ABC\)](#) program can accommodate 26 mothers and their children. The [20-year-old program](#) exists in a relatively new \$2 million building with a full kitchen and includes programming to help mothers with everything from postpartum counseling to parenting and breastfeeding concerns. The program also offers regular appointments with pediatricians. Moms must have a job or take classes while in the program.

Additionally, many states have filed or passed “Dignity Bills” aimed at creating better conditions for pregnant women behind bars. One in North Carolina, the [“Dignity for Women Who Are Incarcerated Act,”](#) effective Dec. 1, 2021, demonstrates the strides being made toward more humane conditions. Some of its provisions to incarcerated women include the following:

- Sufficient menstrual products at no cost.
- Free prenatal, labor, and delivery care.
- Bed height of no more than 3 feet during pregnancy and in the six-week postpartum recovery period.



## TRAILBLAZING WITH DOULAS

- In 2011, the Minnesota Prison Doula Project began. Within five years the program had helped about [100 women in over 80 county jails](#).
- With the help of doulas, women housed in the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Shakopee had about [95%](#) fewer C-sections according to a study conducted in conjunction with the University of Minnesota.
- By the time Alabama launched a similar program in 2016, Prison Birth Project, officials in nearly a dozen states had their eyes on Minnesota and were interested in following this trailblazer's lead.

- Restraint limitations for pregnant women during their latter two trimesters, during labor and delivery, and also for those who are postpartum.
- Body cavity searches prohibited for pregnant and postpartum women, unless performed by a certified medical professional. Exceptions are made when there is reason to believe pregnant women are hiding harmful contraband.
- Mother-baby bonding period during the entirety of the mother's hospital stay except when this arrangement poses a health or safety risk to the baby.

### THE DOULA DIFFERENCE

Thoughts of being restrained during labor are stressful and discouraging. But one positive change some women can expect to see in a few prisons and jails across the U.S. is the introduction of doulas. A doula serves as a birth coach who provides emotional and physical support to women throughout pregnancy, during labor, and after delivery. Doulas offer new mothers practical advice and help them advocate for themselves. Along with the hospital staff and correctional officers, doulas are typically the only other people allowed in the birthing room with an incarcerated mother-to-be. Their services to incarcerated women have resulted in shorter labors, [healthier moms and babies](#), and [fewer cesarean sections](#) or C-sections.

### WHEN A DOULA ISN'T AVAILABLE

Perhaps you're serving time in a state that doesn't offer services like Minnesota. There are still things you can do to prepare yourself for your pregnancy, labor, and delivery.

As soon as your facility's medical team confirms

your pregnancy, determine the services available to you as an expectant mother. Ask about prenatal care including vitamins, wellness checkups, snacks in between meals, ultrasounds, and a reduction in your workload if you have a job.

Then, think further ahead and begin planning. If you're still incarcerated after you deliver, who will care for your baby? Can you enroll in parenting classes? Is there a breast-milk pumping program at your facility? If not, can one be started?

You may have some level of uncertainty and fears about your situation. That's normal. But, how will you maintain a positive outlook and avoid feeling too overwhelmed about the future? Try spending some quiet time in prayer, meditation, or Bible study. (For more on these topics, check out [Chapter 4](#).) Make this a habit. It could help you achieve a sense of peace.

## THE BABY BLUES VS. POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

In the two weeks following childbirth, you'll be glad you incorporated some peaceful habits into your day. That way, you'll be better prepared if you begin to experience mild depression known as the "baby blues." Symptoms can range from crying and mood swings to anxiety and overwhelm.

If you're an incarcerated woman who has recently gone through being restrained during labor, the loneliness of giving birth without family nearby, and the anguish of being separated from your baby for an indefinite period of time, you could experience a more serious condition: postpartum depression. Some of the symptoms include hopelessness, panic attacks, excessive crying, severe mood swings, and repeated thoughts about harming yourself or others.

Having a new baby is hard. Having one while you're incarcerated is even harder. So, make plans to talk with a counselor. You'll need to process your emotions. Be patient with yourself.

## Dealing With Women's Cancers While Incarcerated

There's more to feminine health than menstrual cycles and childbirth. Women's cancers must also be considered. If you had poor access to health care or gaps in your care prior to your incarceration, you may never have had a clinical breast exam or a mammogram to screen for breast cancer. But the best cancer outcomes occur with early detection.

### BREAST CANCER

Once you realize the importance of preventive health screenings, you'll want to get them while

they're available to you in prison. When Teresa was incarcerated, a mammogram bus periodically visited her facility. According to the American Cancer Society's website, [mammograms can detect up to 85% of breast cancers](#).

Even if a mobile mammogram clinic doesn't come where you are or you haven't reached the recommended age (40 years) to receive this screening, you can perform monthly [breast self-exams](#) to become familiar with your breasts' look and feel, especially between mammograms. Alert the medical personnel at your facility if you notice a discharge from your nipple, tenderness, or any changes in the size, appearance, or density of your breast.

## CERVICAL CANCER

Women behind bars experience [higher rates of cervical cancer](#) than women in the free world. Cervical cancer is the [fourth most common cancer among women](#). Because the disease progresses slowly, it can be treated. The American Cancer Society suggests regular screenings (Pap smears or HPV tests) for most women who are 25-65 years old. Find out when your facility offers them and get scheduled if you're within the recommended age range.

If you've never had a cervical cancer screening or you haven't kept your screening current, you may be at risk. Other risk factors include:

- Promiscuity and sexual activity that begins at a young age.
- Long-term use of birth control pills.
- HPV infection. (HPV is a sexually transmitted virus that can cause cervical cancer.)
- Smoking.
- HIV infection or other disease that weakens the immune system.
- Obesity.
- Chlamydia infection.

## OVARIAN CANCER

Sometimes, reliable, routine screenings can detect cancers before you notice any symptoms. For most women who aren't high risk for ovarian cancer, though, screening isn't recommended. This type of cancer is typically diagnosed with tests once you notice a problem. But by then, the disease has probably spread.

Because it can be difficult to diagnose, ovarian cancer is the leading cause of death among

reproductive cancers. So, if you develop any of these early warning signs, voice your concern.

- Bloating.
- Pain in the abdomen.
- Full feeling, making it difficult to finish a meal.
- Frequent urination (or the urge to urinate).

## TO SCREEN OR NOT TO SCREEN

Understandably, you may not feel comfortable agreeing to a pelvic exam, mammogram, or Pap smear. Like countless other women in prison, you may have experienced physical and sexual abuse. These exams could trigger feelings you may not be ready to confront.

Chanda understands your reluctance. She has heard women say, "They're not going to be messing with my body!" Still, she advises women to press through any feelings of discomfort and go through with their exams. Preventing disease is easier and more effective than trying to diagnose and treat it later.

## A CANCER DIAGNOSIS?

It may take a while to arrive at a cancer diagnosis. You may need to wait several weeks to be scheduled for off-site appointments to get additional testing. And, if your diagnostic tests confirm a cancer diagnosis, you might be assigned to a medical ward, which could require you to transfer to another facility. Your treatment plan could include surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, or other regimens.

When you meet with doctors, remember, you not only need to be a good listener, but you must also use your voice. Ask questions about your condition. Make sure you understand any instructions you're given. Don't worry about

what you could have done to prevent this diagnosis. Instead, focus on what you can do to create a better future despite your diagnosis. You could start by visiting a chaplain to request resources and get encouragement. You might also consider having conversations with a mentor or another woman who is positive, trustworthy, and whose conversation is uplifting.

## Living With Chronic or Communicable Diseases While in Prison

It's not uncommon for other women to show kindness toward those who bravely battle an illness like cancer. But you also have a responsibility to be kind to yourself.

### CHRONIC ILLNESSES IN PRISON

You may not want to admit it, but prison may be just the right place for you to get the medical care you need. You may find that some issues like diabetes and high blood pressure are better managed in prison. On the outside, you may not have had access to good health care, reliable

transportation to a medical facility, or money to pay for a doctor's visit. These burdens become lighter when you're in prison.

And, if you need prescriptions, they're conveniently located on-site. However, you may have to stand in an injection line or pill line to have them administered. Other medications may be dubbed KOPs: keep-on-person medications. At some facilities, you may be allowed to keep those in your locker to take as prescribed. But every facility is different. Follow the rules at your location based on your security level. Let your actions reveal that you're concerned about your health care.



**Forty percent of all incarcerated people in the U.S. currently have a chronic disease, many of which are diagnosed for the first time at intake. And a lot of those health issues are related to the reasons people get incarcerated in the first place. Maladies related to drug and alcohol use, as well as mental health issues and homelessness, are overrepresented in prison.**

—Sojourner Ahébee, a journalist who covers health equity via the podcast, [The Pulse](#).

### COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Getting immunized is one action you can take to make sure you're not only being responsible with your own health, but you're also considerate of others in your community, because in prison, communicable diseases are more common than in the free world. A communicable disease is one that is contagious because it can be spread from person to person.

Overcrowded prisons are breeding grounds for airborne infections like COVID-19, tuberculosis, and the flu. Sexually transmitted infections are also more common behind bars than on the outside. And, women typically present with more cases—like chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis—than their male counterparts. Incarcerated populations also have [HIV and AIDS at three times the rate](#) of people who aren't behind bars, so avoiding sexual relationships in prison is wise.

Communicable diseases like hepatitis C are common among those who use dirty needles. Hepatitis C is a virus that affects the liver. It is spread when an infected person's blood mixes with someone else's. Any of the following could put you at risk for the disease:

- Bloodshed during a fight with an infected person.
- Getting tattoos with unsterilized equipment.
- Sharing a razor with an infected person.
- Sexual intercourse with someone who's infected.

Many facilities offer screening for this virus. Some even offer treatment. If you're at risk for the disease and have the following symptoms, ask to be seen by a medical professional:

- Bruising easily.
- Experiencing fatigue.
- Having an upset stomach.
- Yellowing skin or eyes.
- Darkening urine.
- Losing weight.

## Aging in Prison

Having a communicable disease while you're incarcerated isn't the only thing that can add more stress to your day. As you age, you may start to notice changes in your mood, your body, and even your sleep patterns. How will you respond?

### MENOPAUSE

Simply put, menopause is when your cycle pauses. For good. This is a naturally occurring biological process that you can expect when you're around 50 years old (though it happens earlier for some women than others). This marks the end of a woman's reproductive years and can be accompanied by the following symptoms:

- Irregularities in your cycles. (They may get lighter, heavier, last longer, or get shorter. You may even experience skipped cycles. Eventually they disappear altogether.)
- Hot flashes that last up to 10 minutes.
- Vaginal dryness.

- Sleep changes and night sweats.
- Irritability and other mood changes.
- Body appearance (e.g., thinning skin and weight gain).
- Body function (e.g., new aches and pains and memory problems).

Hormone replacement therapy may help relieve some of your symptoms, especially hot flashes. As the name suggests, this therapy replaces female hormones the body stops producing after menopause. This therapy isn't for everyone, though, and it's best to start the regimen earlier in your menopause journey than later. Otherwise, you could realize adverse effects. Ask to speak with an on-site nurse or physician to determine what's best for you and whether this therapy is available at your facility.

If you're unsure about adding a new medication to your routine, consider purchasing a small, plug-in fan for your cell to help with hot flashes, instead. Additionally, give yourself a little grace



## AGE, ACHES, AND ANXIETY: WHAT'S STEALING YOUR SLEEP?

Most women who get seven to nine hours of quality sleep each night will feel rested. If you get less than seven hours' sleep consistently, serious medical conditions could surface: heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and even memory-related illnesses.

Getting quality sleep in prison can be tough, at first, especially if your prison is overcrowded. You can expect random noises at night, and if you suffer from anxiety, you could also experience restlessness. If you've been identified as a suicide risk, prevention checks by correctional staff—as often as [four times per hour](#)—may keep you awake. And, as you get older, aches and pains can interrupt your sleep too. To learn more about setting evening routines to promote better sleep, visit [Chapter 4](#).

as you wait for mood swings to subside. This season will eventually pass.

### WORSENING EYESIGHT AND HEARING

If quality sleep has been a problem for you because of menopause, consider reading a newspaper or a book to settle yourself down before bedtime. However, once you turn 40, you may begin to get headaches when you read, and the words may appear blurry. You may also find yourself holding your reading materials farther away for clarity.

This is normal for aging eyes, and your condition could progress. Reading glasses might be a good fix. However, a doctor must first determine whether your condition involves a medical issue. A vision screening may be in order. When was your last one?

Like your eyesight, your hearing diminishes with age. Men and women behind bars have more hearing loss than other groups because of common lifestyle factors prior to and during incarceration. Any one of the following scenarios could result in hearing loss:

- Living or working in a noisy environment.
- Experiencing a head injury.
- Abusing drugs.
- Listening through headphones that are set at a high volume.

If you have a hearing problem, the accommodations you receive should be commensurate with the severity of your impairment. Submit a request to speak to a staff member if you feel you're being unfairly punished for ignoring an order you didn't hear; you are not able to fully experience classes or religious services; or you're having trouble communicating with others.

## PRISON: STAYING COOL IN HOT SPOTS

Some of the hottest properties in America's South are prisons. Unlike most homes in the region, many prisons don't have air conditioning—including several prisons in states like Texas, Florida, and Arizona. Because prisons are typically built with materials that hold heat, the facilities' interior temperatures can be more brutal than the temperature outside.

If you're elderly, have a chronic health condition, or you're taking blood pressure medication, you'll need to be especially careful during your incarceration if your facility isn't air conditioned. Your environment places you at a greater risk for heart attack, heat stroke, or respiratory illness, especially during summer months.

If you happen to live in a hot spot, keep the following tips in mind:

- Stay hydrated with caffeine-free drinks. Drink lots of water.
- Get a small fan from the commissary if it's affordable. Consider placing ice in front of it to cool the air even more.
- Dampen a towel or wash cloth with cool water, and place it on the back of your neck or on your forehead to keep you cool.
- Take a cool shower.
- Block out as much sunlight as possible without blocking security's view.

### Source:

"Cruel and unusual punishment: When states don't provide air conditioning in prison: 13 states in the hottest parts of the country lack universal A/C in their prisons. We explain the consequences." <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/06/18/air-conditioning/>. Prison Policy Initiative. Alexi Jones. Accessed October 1, 2021.

Some correctional facilities have provided the following alternatives so as not to discriminate against the hearing impaired. (Your facility may provide different options):

- Video conferencing.
- Peer sign-language interpreter.
- Hearing aids and batteries.
- Vests to identify the hearing impaired.
- Better ways to communicate when activities like prison count or yard time will occur.

## MENTAL ALERTNESS

As you age, you'll also want to keep a sharp mind, but as you get older it's normal to become a little more forgetful. Consider these strategies to help keep your brain alert and active:

- Take your medications, keep your doctors' appointments, and strive for physical fitness.
- Learn something new or teach someone else a skill you have. Draw. Read books. Take classes. Play a game.
- Make healthy relationships. Get involved in social activities.
- Write down your worries to let go of some of your stress.
- Use relaxation techniques and embrace a positive attitude. (Refer to the mindfulness techniques in [Chapter 2](#).)

You may feel like it's impossible to stay positive when so many things are out of your control. Find the joy in simple things like a small act of kindness from someone else, a comfortable breeze on the yard, or a memory that makes you smile. When you do, you'll find that your stress level decreases.

## HEART DISEASE

Decreasing your stress level doesn't just improve your mood. It's also good for your heart. And as you age, your heart could use a little extra care. The older you get, your heart doesn't respond to stress the way it did when you were younger. By age [65](#) you're already at an increased risk for several conditions including heart attack and stroke. If left untreated, heart disease can lead to physical disability and even death.

Heart disease occurs over time as fat deposits build up in your arteries and narrows them so less blood can get through. Your heart then pumps harder. Eventually, it weakens or becomes damaged.

Some of the [warning signs](#) of heart disease are below:

- Pain, numbness, or tingling in the neck, jaw, arms, or back.
- Chest pain (left side) or tightness especially near the heart.
- Shortness of breath.
- Lightheadedness or fainting.
- Nausea.
- Exhaustion.

The best ways to avoid experiencing heart disease are to maintain a healthy weight, eat as healthily as possible (see [Chapter 1](#) for more on healthy eating in prison), exercise regularly, avoid using drugs, and don't smoke. Additionally, if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol, make sure you are taking the medications you need to keep it under control.

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## Mental Health

Physical illnesses like heart disease shouldn't be the only issues grabbing your attention. Your mental health is also important because it involves your emotional, social, and intellectual well-being. When your mental health is intact, you're better equipped to be a productive citizen in your community. You also realize your worth.

When you make your mental health a priority, you're less likely to allow stress to keep you down. Instead, you are empowered to help others. You keep a positive mindset, stay active, and nurture healthy relationships. Then, when trouble comes your way, you know how much you can handle and realize when it's time to seek professional help.

## DEPRESSION

However, when you ignore issues or let them build up, depression can result. No doubt, one of the most stressful, humbling times in your life is when you are sent to prison. You think about all the restrictions you're enduring. You miss friends and family. You wonder what others on the outside think about you. You regret the actions that landed you behind bars.

Constantly thinking about these things creates a heavy burden. So, follow the necessary steps to request some time with a mental health professional. If you can't make an appointment right away, try visiting the chaplain in the meantime. Some of them are trained in counseling and have experience dealing with people whose emotions are raw.

You could also consider talking to another woman who has had similar experiences or who is willing to listen. When you're depressed, a listening ear may help you process your trauma and provide another perspective. This is not a good time for you to be alone and withdraw from others.

Your freedom may be gone, but your hope doesn't have to be. Keep pressing on for your sake and your children's (if you have them).

## ANXIETY

Audrey Fay, director of church mobilization for Prison Fellowship and a former prisoner, got quite the shock when she went to prison and suddenly realized she had lost all her freedom. She became fearful and anxious. She says, "On the receiving yard, when I was sitting there waiting to be processed, it hit me so firmly that I was in this really hostile environment. And that if I didn't stop showing fear and stop showing anxiety, then I was going to be eaten alive."

Kathleen Trissel, an Ohio-based licensed professional clinical counselor, affirms that when you enter prison, you enter a new environment, with new roles, and an unwritten code between

prisoners. You're dealing with a lot, and you're not sure how you're supposed to act.

And then, Lisa Kratz Thomas, a speaker, prison reform advocate, and former prisoner, says: "The noise in jail, it just never stops. It's hardly ever quiet. ... It creates a lot of anxiety."

Prison is filled with people, activities, and things that could make you anxious. And when you do get anxious, expect to experience some of these common symptoms:

- Trembling.
- Sweating.
- Rapid heart rate.
- Hyperventilation.
- Nervousness.
- Feeling that something bad is about to happen.

You may feel anxious, but help is available. Request it. Giving up on yourself is never a good option. Use your prison sentence to heal, grow in faith, and beat your fears.

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## In Summary

From maxi pads and menopause to mental health and mammograms, this chapter speaks to the unique health care needs of incarcerated women of all ages. Whether you learned about what it's like to age in prison or become a new mom behind bars, you've been given encouragement, advice, and a few tips from women who have been where you are. Use this information to help you thrive.

In Chapter 4, expect discussions on spiritual and behavioral health that delve into setting goals, developing a spiritual community in prison, and more.

## End Notes

1. Stacey Abrams is a Georgia-based politician, voting rights activist, and novelist. This quote is taken from her May 9, 2021, interview with Erin Moriarty on [CBS Sunday Morning](#).

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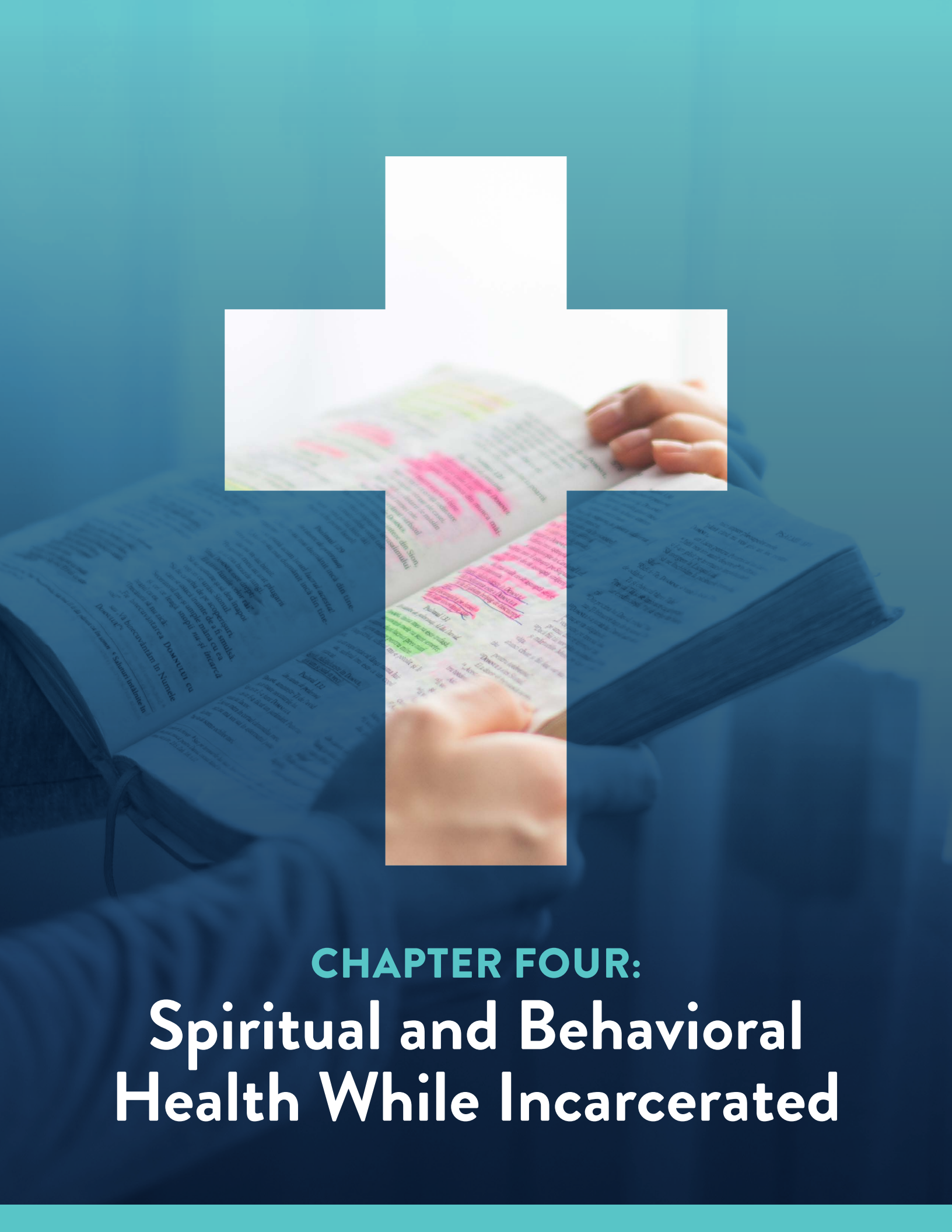
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## CHAPTER FOUR:

# Spiritual and Behavioral Health While Incarcerated

## CHAPTER FOUR

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At some point in your life, you may have visited a place of worship, read Scripture, meditated, or prayed. But like some women behind bars, maybe you're still confused. Perhaps religious people have condemned you or abused you. Maybe a spiritual leader who you held in high regard made you feel worthless. And now, perhaps you're not sure what you believe.

As Lysa TerKeurst, president of [Proverbs 31 Ministries](#), a Christian ministry to women, has written, “[You] don’t have to have all the answers, [you] just have to stay connected to the One who does.”<sup>1</sup>

Simply put, you need divine guidance to thrive during your incarceration. But why is spiritual health so important? Everything you think, do, and say is based upon what you believe about your identity and your purpose in the world. If you hope to thrive and embrace behaviors that set you up for success, maintaining your spiritual health is key.

### DISCLAIMER

The content in this guide is for informational and educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical, psychological, or legal advice. Please consult the appropriate entity (e.g., medical professional, healthcare provider, or attorney) if you are seeking advice, a diagnosis, or a treatment plan. Neither Prison Fellowship® nor its employees are responsible for the risks or issues associated with using or acting upon the information in this guide.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Studies show that people who build their lives around a spiritual belief system tend to have better heart health, fare better after surgery, and even have longer lifespans. But the health benefits don't stop there.

When you identify with a community of people who share your religious beliefs, your mental health can improve. By having something to believe in and realizing that you're not alone, you're less likely to hold on to hurts, commit suicide, or abuse drugs and alcohol. Faith in a higher power, when presented in a way that builds up people instead of tearing them down, packs some positive, powerful effects.

## Embrace the Opportunity



**When you look around in prisons or jails there are so many people who come alive in that environment. ... And it's because there's time there to rediscover those gifts that God has given you that you've covered up with drugs, alcohol, men, sex—whatever it is that got you into trouble.**

As you realize the benefits of spiritual healthiness, you may want to make a beeline to the chapel. Although you'd be making a sprint in the right direction, maintaining good spiritual health requires so much more.

Ilinda Jackson, the senior chaplain at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in McCloud, Oklahoma, suggests searching for some light in the place you're in, connecting with the right people, and keeping your conversation positive. She encourages women in prison by letting them know there's hope in the chaplain, prison programming, and the many staff members who share a common desire: to see you go home restored and not come back. When you take advantage of the resources available to you in prison and do what's right and good, you might even be able to expedite your homecoming. Prison presents many opportunities for you to change—for your future and for your children's, if you have any. Will you embrace these opportunities? Now is the perfect time.



## GETTING RELIGION

Although your spiritual journey could begin in the chapel, it shouldn't end there. Some prisoners get [jailhouse religion](#). They embrace a particular faith in an act of desperation or during an emotional moment in a worship service. Then, when the newness wears off, they end up living a dual life that shows they never fully understood the commitment involved.

We at Prison Fellowship® advocate lifelong transformations that lead to restored, whole, healthy hearts and minds—not temporary tears and lip service. When a lasting change occurs, you're better prepared to love God, your neighbor, and yourself.

You may believe that your brokenness makes you unworthy to experience this kind of transformation. Perhaps you've allowed discouraging comments from religious folks to replay in your mind, and you've been unsuccessful in erasing those voices of judgment. If so, stay hopeful! Only broken people need to be restored. Whether you entered prison tired, unhealthy, downright sick, or in the middle of a detox, God can fix you, clean you, and use you for His good purposes. Will you let Him?

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF A LIFETIME

If you like the idea of being restored, see the infographic *Good News: You Can Give the Wheel to Jesus*. It illustrates how you could be just one decision away from having a transformed life.

Prison Fellowship is a Christian organization, and we are motivated to serve incarcerated women because of the changes God has made in our own lives. We believe the best decision you can make is to follow Jesus for yourself.

## GOOD NEWS: YOU CAN GIVE THE WHEEL TO JESUS

Now that you're behind bars, you've had time to think about the decisions you've made. You probably feel like your life is a wreck right now because you've driven yourself onto a rough road that led to prison.

If you're tired of feeling lost, ashamed, and alone, these five questions will help guide you in the right direction. There is a better way to live.

**01**     **Are you ready for a radical change?** We all have steered ourselves onto dangerous paths that we ended up regretting (Romans 3:23). Are you willing to let go of the wheel and give control to Jesus instead? If you're looking for a life transformation, you'll find it in Him. He has an amazing plan.

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**02**     **What happens if you're not ready to give control to Jesus?** When you keep driving yourself on the roads you've always driven, you'll continue to end up in the same dark places and situations you've always been. You can expect more regrets, self-destruction, and separation from God (Romans 6:23).

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**03**     **What's so special about Jesus' plan?** God sent Jesus to rescue us all, and yes, that includes you. During His rescue mission, He suffered, died, was buried, and was brought back to life. He loves you that much (Romans 5:7-10 and John 3:16)!

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**04**     **What will it cost you to follow Jesus?** Nothing! Consider this rescue plan God's gift to you (Ephesians 2:8-9).

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**05**     **How can you accept this gift?** It's as easy as ABC:

- Admit you've been in control too long; you need Jesus to take over.
- Believe that God sent Jesus to rescue you.
- Confess your trust in Jesus. Then, get out of the way and let Him steer you on the right path.

### PRAYER

Jesus, I can't do life on my own terms anymore. I'm tired of the crash course I've been navigating, and I want to live differently. I'm ready for you to lead me. I accept your amazing rescue plan, and I'm ready to be transformed. Amen.

## Finding Your Way Around the Bible

### WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The Bible is a book about God's sacrificial love for all people. It teaches us how to live.

The Bible is also known as God's Word, the Holy Bible, and Scripture.

The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is a collection of history, poetry, and wisdom about God's faithfulness. The New Testament tells about Jesus' life and teachings and how to follow Him.

## 66 Books in the Bible

39 OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS			27 NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS	
Genesis	2 Chronicles	Daniel	Matthew	1 Timothy
Exodus	Ezra	Hosea	Mark	2 Timothy
Leviticus	Nehemiah	Joel	Luke	Titus
Numbers	Esther	Amos	John	Philemon
Deuteronomy	Job	Obadiah	Acts	Hebrews
Joshua	Psalms	Jonah	Romans	James
Judges	Proverbs	Micah	1 Corinthians	1 Peter
Ruth	Ecclesiastes	Nahum	2 Corinthians	2 Peter
1 Samuel	Song of Songs	Habakkuk	Galatians	1 John
2 Samuel	Isaiah	Zephaniah	Ephesians	2 John
1 Kings	Jeremiah	Haggai	Philippians	3 John
2 Kings	Lamentations	Zechariah	Colossians	Jude
1 Chronicles	Ezekiel	Malachi	1 Thessalonians	Revelation
			2 Thessalonians	

**“Do to others as you would like them to do to you” (Luke 6:31, NLT).**

**“Do to others as you would like them to do to you.”**

*The Scripture (or verse text)*

**Luke**

*Book name (one of the 66 subdivisions of the Old and New Testaments)*

**6**

*Chapter number*

**31**

*Verse number*

**NLT**

*New Living Translation (the version or translation of the Bible that's being quoted)*

## A New Creation

When you accept and believe God's message of hope, you have a new, exciting identity: daughter of God! He equips you to serve your neighbors instead of continuing cycles of crime. You can also expect subtle, continuous changes in your behavior, habits, and desires. But what does this look like?



**There is a change in a person who has received Christ. ... They are a new creation and change typically occurs from the inside out. ... Even if there's not an immediate change in behavior, there's still going to be a change of focus. ... You can see it in some attitude changes. If they are struggling with depression or anxiety, you might see a little bit more calmness. [You] might see them reaching out to others to encourage them.**

*—Kathleen Trissel, an Ohio-based licensed professional clinical counselor*

## Individual Practices to Improve Your Spiritual Health

Whether you are a lifelong Christian, a brand-new one, a member of a different faith, or not even sure if God exists, we encourage you to keep reading. No matter where you are in your journey, you can still benefit from practicing principles of spiritual health like the ones below.

### MEDITATION

Meditation is an ancient tradition that many cultures have adopted worldwide to invoke peacefulness, promote compassion, encourage relaxation, improve mood, raise awareness of one's surroundings, and more. It uses body movements, deep breathing, quiet reflection, visualization, memorization, and other techniques to achieve inner calmness or experience better connection with God. From Buddhism to Christianity and beyond, many religions embrace some form of meditation. (For an example of mindfulness meditation, see Chapter 2, "[Recovering From Substance Abuse and Addiction Issues](#).")

The benefits of meditation are widespread. Meditation may even improve ailments like these:

- Pain.
- Anxiety and depression.
- Sleep issues.
- High blood pressure.
- Poor attention span.
- Age-related memory loss.

## MEDITATE ON THIS

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take” (Proverbs 3:5-6, NLT).<sup>2</sup>*

Meditation may be as simple as focusing on something you’ve read, pondering its meaning, and then considering how it applies to your life. When you’re ready to give it a try, use these steps as a guide:

- 01 **Check your surroundings.** Try to quiet yourself in a place with as few distractions as possible.
- 02 **Read the Scripture above** (or select an inspirational quote from a book in your library). Reread it slowly. Think deeply about its truth.
- 03 **Reflect on any questions that come to mind.**
- 04 **Put the Scripture in your own words** or consider what you would say if you tried to explain it to someone else.
- 05 **Make it personal.** Ask yourself, *How does this apply to my life? and What might I need to do differently to live according to this truth?*

Meditating on Scripture means reflecting deeply on small pieces of it, like savoring small bites of a delicious meal and focusing on each individual flavor. Audrey Fay, the director of church mobilization for Prison Fellowship and former prisoner, knows the importance of this practice.

She says, “A lot of people inside prison know the Bible inside and out, but they don’t have a relationship with Christ. They can read it, they can quote the Scriptures, they can do all that, but they don’t have a spiritual side.” Incorporating meditation helps develop that spiritual side. Then, you’re less concerned about how many Scriptures you read, and you become more concerned with understanding them and letting them become part of you. Sometimes that means you’ll only be able to digest a few verses at a time, and then pray or journal about what you’ve read.

### INSPIRATIONAL READING

Meditation not only helps you to experience inner calmness, but it also helps you to keep your mind sharp. Vanessa Franklin, a restored citizen and Prison Fellowship’s national director of field operations, says, “Great leaders are readers.” She suggests you develop this skill because it will help you mature spiritually.

But, what if you’re like many women in prison who have trouble reading or understanding the books in their facility’s library? If this sounds like you, perhaps you could have a learning disability that has not been diagnosed. Maybe your reading skills fell behind in school, and you were never able to catch up. Did you drop out of high school?

Now’s a great time to become a better reader. Take advantage of your facility’s literacy programs. Then, use Scripture or inspirational reading to improve your skills, build your confidence, and gain new knowledge.

Ask the chaplain at your facility about Inside Journal®, a quarterly newspaper printed and distributed by Prison Fellowship to over 800 prisons across the country. Inside Journal is simpler to read than many newspapers and is offered in a men’s edition, a women’s edition, and a Spanish-language edition. Written specifically for incarcerated men and women, each issue includes the Good News about Jesus, fun activities, relatable stories about prisoners with transformed lives, ideas about how to best use your time behind bars, and more. When you need inspiration, you’ll find it there.

Kathleen, an Ohio-based licensed professional clinical counselor, encourages you to pay attention to what you’re feeding your mind. Sometimes what you read represents where you are emotionally instead of where you want to be. However, you can read material that will take you into a place of peace and calm. Does your reading list uplift you or pull you down?

### SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION

Kathleen not only advises you to review your reading list, but she also suggests you try memorizing Scripture. Start with just a few words at a time and add more words when you’re ready. She emphasizes how women, especially, tend to mull over things by playing scenarios repeatedly in their minds. But, if you play Scripture over and over in your mind instead, you’re “replacing those negative thoughts, the rumination, the obsessions, the internal conflicts, and the external conflicts ... with something that is very beautiful and special.”

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT YOUR SITUATION?

Would you like to read the Bible but have no clue where to begin? Try reading Scriptures based upon your experiences or current spiritual needs. Allow this list to guide you.

What You Need	What to Read
You need to know how to conduct yourself.	Exodus 20:1-17
You need help because you’re lonely and afraid.	Psalms 23
You regret things you’ve done and seek forgiveness.	Psalms 51 and 1 John 1:8-9
You need God’s help as you grow old.	Psalms 71:17-18
You want to feel God’s presence.	Psalms 139
You need strength to keep pressing on.	Isaiah 40:28-31
You need rest.	Matthew 11:28-30
You want to know what real love looks like.	John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 13
You’re anxious and need peace.	Philippians 4:6-7
You need a boost of faith.	Hebrews 11
You want wisdom.	James 1:5-8



Audrey recalls her past with Scripture memorization and admits, “I didn’t know how to pray. I didn’t know what it meant to pray. I didn’t know anything. I literally opened up the Bible, and I saw the Lord’s Prayer.” She memorized that prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), and for the 18 months she was incarcerated, she walked around the track reciting it. During this time, she grew closer to God. Eventually her prayers expanded. She began to pray for herself and others.

### PURSUING DEEPER STUDY

The more time Audrey spent in prayer, the more inclusive her prayers became. She went deeper. Like Audrey, once you’ve incorporated some good habits into your routine and have reaped their benefits, you’ll probably want to go deeper too. You can start this process by asking your chaplain about taking courses in which all communication between a student and teacher takes place completely by mail. These types of courses are also known as correspondence courses.

Prison Fellowship partners with [Crossroads Prison Ministries](#) to provide more than a dozen self-paced correspondence courses—all free of charge. Crossroads sends you the materials and connects you with mentors to help you along the way. As you complete the Bible study coursework and communicate with a mentor via mail, you’ll learn more about God and realize what following Him really entails. As you fill your mind with good things and receive the support of godly people, expect your mindset to shift. See your chaplain or program director for more information or to get an application if one is available.

### RENEWING YOUR MINDSET

Although you might fill your mind with good things like Bible studies, Scripture, or inspirational stories, you will have feelings of resentment, guilt, shame, etc., that come along with incarceration. That’s normal.

You may not always be able to control what comes to mind, but you can work on redirecting your thoughts and controlling your responses. So, when you feel like rolling your eyes in a class or sitting in the back row without participating, keep showing up anyway. Remind yourself why you signed up in the first place. This will help you to renew your mind, reject chaos, and invite order into your day.

### SETTING GOALS

One way to a well-ordered life is to have a plan: a set of goals and a strategy for achieving them. Do you know the difference between a desire and a goal?



**A goal is something you can achieve on your own. Nobody can block that. With your own choices, your own will, and God’s power, you can attain that. But a desire is something that you’d like to have happen. You pray for it, but it could be blocked by somebody else.**

*—Marci Maddux, a South Dakota-based biblical counselor*

When you confuse your desires with your goals, you set yourself up for disappointment. For example, having your family back together is a good desire to work toward, but it could be blocked through the courts. However, committing to write one letter to your daughter each week to increase your communication with her is a great goal.

Consider thinking about your goals early. Perhaps you've recently received your court sentence and you're headed to prison. If so, Audrey suggests when you're sitting in a holding cell waiting to complete the intake process, make a firm decision to start making goals for yourself that are different from the ones that got you there. If you've been behind bars for some time, it's never too late to make a commitment to do better, and goal setting is the way to achieve the productive life you want.

Not just any goals will do; SMART goals will help you see real progress. Learn more about them in the infographic "Setting SMART Goals."

## SETTING SMART GOALS

**Specific:** Is your goal clearly defined? If you make a goal too broad, you may have trouble identifying all the steps you'll need to complete it.

**Measurable:** Decide how you will track your progress and know when you've met your goal.

**Achievable:** Make your goal challenging but not unreachable.

**Relevant:** Is your goal worthwhile and important to you? If you're not passionate about your goal, you're more likely to quit.

**Timely:** Assign a deadline to your goal to help keep you moving toward it. If your goal is big, break it into small steps, each with their own deadlines along the way.

### *Which of the following is a SMART goal?*

- A)** I will see more spiritual growth in myself this year.
- B)** I will read the entire Bible and five self-help books this week.
- C)** I will get an associate degree in business administration while I am incarcerated.
- D)** This month, I will walk around the track for 30 minutes three days per week.

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Answer: "D" is the correct answer. The others fall short in one or more categories noted below.

Issue	Goal
Not specific enough	A, C
Unachievable	B
Can't be measured easily	A
Deadline is too far away	A

## BOOST PRODUCTIVITY WITH A GOOD SCHEDULE

Whatever your goals were in your past, they probably didn't include living behind bars. "I don't think a little girl playing jacks, jumping rope, playing with Barbie dolls, or playing on a video game ever sees [prison] as part of her goal set," says Chaplain Jackson. But now that you're behind bars, you can make the best of your time by simply being productive.

Lisa Kratz Thomas, is a speaker, prison reform advocate, and former prisoner who founded and operated a women's transitional home. There, she noticed that women would come in with habits of idleness they picked up during their sentences. Many would grab the remote control, flop on the couch, dodge responsibilities, and let the day waste away.

Things changed when she and her team implemented an exercise program. The women tracked their activities and began to see positive, physical changes in themselves. They could look back at their progress with pride. Then, they wanted to do more. This new routine started a progressive cycle that helped their mind, body, and spirit.

A full schedule was the key to productivity for the women Lisa served. She ensured they not only exercised but had morning devotions. What activities can you add to your schedule to make sure you're making your day meaningful?

## WHAT ARE DEVOTIONS?

Devotions are individual, dedicated times of prayer or worship. During devotions, Christians seek to mature spiritually, grow in their understanding of who God is, get spiritually prepared for the day ahead (or reflect on the day that is ending), and demonstrate their dedication to God by making this practice a daily routine.

Morning (or evening) devotions could additionally include any combination of the following:

- Carefully reading a passage from the Bible.
- Using a daily devotional book that contains a Scripture, a brief story to illustrate the Scripture, and a way to help you to apply it to your life.
- Journaling your prayers, responses to Scripture, or gratefulness.
- Singing hymns.
- Meditating.

Devotions may also be referred to as "quiet time" because they're typically done in a place without distractions. The devotions don't need to be long. If they help renew your mind, you're on the right track. To whom or what are you devoted?

## THE RIGHT START

How you start your day matters. Will you sing an inspirational song? Will you begin with devotions or quiet, reflective time?

You may want to consider having one-on-one time with God before you go out to meet the day's challenges. You never know what kind of personalities you'll have to deal with or what type of protection you'll need when you walk onto the yard. Starting your day in a reflective, prayerful way can provide the peace and calm you need for tense situations.

Remember, you can also fill your mind with positive affirmations, start your day by reading Scripture, meet up with someone on the yard to study the Bible, or make plans to attend a chapel service. As you continue serving your sentence, find the morning routine that works for you, and stick with it as best you can. These are practices you can take with you outside the prison walls, too. We never "outgrow" the need to spend time with God.

## THE RIGHT FINISH

Although good morning routines can help you to have a brighter outlook and set the pace for your day, your nightly routine matters too. With

a little effort, you could be experiencing more restful evenings by following a few of these [tips](#):

- Avoid taking naps during the day. You might think you're helping the time to pass more quickly, but that's not true. Get active instead.
- During a health checkup, if you've been prescribed medicines, ask a medical professional if any of them could cause you to be restless at night. If so, ask whether an alternative is available because a good night's rest is important to your well-being. Illegal drugs or alcohol affect your sleep too, so don't use them.
- Perform a relaxing activity like meditation or reading one hour before bed. Avoid exercising near your bedtime.
- Wake up and go to bed at consistent times. Establish evening routines.
- Stop drinking caffeine-filled sodas, coffee, or tea a few hours prior to going to bed.

To learn how your sleep might be affected while you're behind bars, see [Chapter 3, "Women's Health."](#)



## Responding to What You Can't Control

Perhaps you're thinking about trying a few tips you've learned to make your mornings and nights go more smoothly while you're incarcerated. That's a good idea, especially since, many times, you'll encounter situations that are beyond your control.

Lockdowns happen, you get sick, people come at you with accusations, and other things can occur

to alter your plans. Inside or outside of prison, you must be ready to respond to what life hands you on any given day.

## YOUR IDENTITY: DO YOU NEED BETTER LABELS?

How you respond to your environment is closely tied to how well you know your identity. It all starts with the labels you give yourself. Kathleen says it's destructive to think of yourself as a

prisoner because being a prisoner is more about your location. It's not who you are.

Try to think of other words or phrases to describe yourself. Perhaps you're a mother. Maybe you do laundry for your facility, or you are trained in CPR. If you've ever decided to accept the Good News about Jesus, then you can remind yourself that you're a daughter of God. You have a purpose, and you're incredibly valuable. Think about these things.

### WALK AWAY FROM CHAOS

When you recognize you have value and significance, you become more confident when threats and problems surface. You may begin to realize that it's OK to walk away from some of the craziness you encounter. That doesn't make you a coward. Instead, that makes you the bigger person.

Even though you may need to respond in the moment, you don't have to be controlled by your impulses. Think ahead and keep your goals in mind. So, when another woman gets in your face, think of something that will motivate you to keep your calm like, *She isn't worth me being away from my kids longer; I don't want to lose my good time, or This argument isn't worth my energy; I need to be thinking about going home to my family.*

### CHANGE YOUR TUNE

You can't handle all confrontations and emotions the same way you did before you were sentenced to prison. Consider the following suggestions for dealing with drama in your current environment. Think about how you would have responded prior to incarceration. How have you changed? In what ways could you improve?

SCENARIO	SUGGESTED RESPONSE
<i>You witness a disturbing argument and begin to feel unsettled.</i>	Consider going to your cell, if possible, to remove yourself from the chaos and reframe the incident by saying to yourself, "This isn't about me. I'm not in the argument. This is not my issue." (For more on reframing, see Booklet 1, Chapter 2 " <a href="#">Recovering from Substance Abuse and Addiction Issues</a> .")
<i>You realize you frequently ask yourself, Why did this happen to me?</i>	If your questions begin to sound like this, you've probably adopted a victim mentality. But you can stop putting all the focus on yourself by thinking lovingly and compassionately about the people you've hurt instead.
<i>Someone on the yard asks you to cover for her, but you don't feel comfortable.</i>	When others pressure you to do something you don't want to do, just say, "No." Be firm without being rude. You'll earn others' respect when you stand your ground and honor your values. Don't lie or give excuses. Lying just makes the problem worse.

<p><b><i>Someone asks you to do something you know you shouldn't do. You understand why she has asked you; you've been there.</i></b></p>	<p>Show empathy when you say, "No." Try saying, "I totally understand why you'd like to have that. I just can't help you get it." Offer a soft answer instead of a defensive one. Be consistent in your responses. When different women ask you for the same thing, don't say, "Yes," to one person and "No," to another. This breeds conflict.</p>
<p><b><i>Your parole was denied. You did everything in your power to prove your trustworthiness. You're devastated.</i></b></p>	<p>When you get unwelcomed news, it's OK to be angry or sad. Just don't let your emotions cause you to hurt anyone—including yourself. If you have a mentor, or a close-knit group, share your grief there. Also consider visiting your chaplain for a safe place to talk, cry, or get encouragement. Others have been where you are and know your pain. Find comfort in knowing you're not alone.</p>
<p><b><i>Someone offers you drugs in what appears to be a friendly gesture.</i></b></p>	<p>In prison, even something that appears to be a gift will come with the expectation of a payback in the future. Say, "No, thank you," and frame it as part of your goals by saying, "I'm not into that right now."</p>

With a renewed mind, you learn to respond differently when someone approaches you with bad intentions. The more you practice renewing your mind, the more you begin to operate in humility and set your ego aside.

When you move your ego out of the way, you're more likely to ask for and receive help, offer an apology, correct your behavioral issues, or consider someone else's point of view. You demonstrate peace versus fear. You also trade negative, impulsive responses for softer, kinder ones.

## Spiritual Community in Prison

You need to be prepared when drama comes your way, but not everyone is looking for trouble. Kathleen says there are a lot of good folks—including many people of faith—who are in prison. Find those good people, because it's not healthy to be alone all the time. That's when depression sets in. (For more on depression while incarcerated, see Booklet 1, Chapter 3, ["Women's Health Issues."](#))

## FIND YOUR FIVE

With whom you associate is important. Vanessa says you become the sum of the five people with whom you spend the most time. Who are your five? Here's her sample list.

1. The positive thinker.
2. The woman who is further along on her road to recovery.
3. The woman who is knowledgeable about physical fitness.



1. The woman who finds ways to be healthier.
2. The mentor who will challenge you to grow.

### GET A MENTOR

Spiritual mentors are women who will help guide you and grow you. These women exhibit the qualities you want to see in yourself. Look around. Some are serving time alongside you. They'll have some good characteristics like these:

- Avoiding hypocrisy.
- Staying out of trouble.
- Having a job.
- Going to classes.
- Doing things to better themselves and being good examples.
- Being productive and not lounging on their bunks all day.

Sometimes you'll have mentors who are volunteers. One of the most powerful things you can do is to get plugged into a mentoring or reentry program early on—even if your sentence is lengthy—according to Chaplain Jackson. This is where you build trustworthy relationships.

Your mentor holds you accountable. And where there's accountability, you begin to feel you're a part of something bigger. Your behavior improves when you're a part of something with lasting benefits.

A mentor cares for you, believes in you, and supports your dreams during and after prison. Once you're released, your mentor might even invite you to a Bible study or worship service since they also provide emotional and spiritual support.

### CHAPLAINS AND PROGRAMMING

Mentors aren't the only ones providing spiritual support. Chaplains generally provide programs across all faith groups represented at their facility. This programming includes Bible studies and other spiritual development programs, as well as programming aimed at helping women socially and behaviorally. Once successfully completed, some programs may generate credits or "good days" that help minimize your sentence.

In addition to spiritual programming, other topics could include:

- Parenting.
- Reuniting with family.
- Victim impact.
- Anger management.
- Substance abuse recovery.

To learn how to sign up for programs offered through the chaplain, check the signs posted in your facility. Keep in mind—chaplains and chaplain programs differ in quality and in their offerings.

## HOW TO BUILD A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

Getting connected with your peers who participate in faith-based programming is important, especially since others will lose contact with you, and sometimes, your family and friends on the outside might grow distant or get too busy to visit. Although you are surrounded by so many other women, you can still feel isolated and alone. That's why it's important to build a spiritual community.

Your spiritual community provides a safe place for you to talk unlike the yard or the cafeteria. If you really want to open up and get others' input or find out if what you're thinking is correct, ask your chaplain about [Create: New Beginnings®](#) or [Prison Fellowship Academy®](#). Your chaplain will know whether these programs are offered at your location. Rooted in Scripture, these two programs allow women to be vulnerable with one another while they become healthy, transformed, and whole citizens.

## In Summary

After reading this chapter, perhaps you accepted the Good News and responded with a simple prayer. Maybe you remembered a couple of ways to keep your mind sharp. Are you considering how you might be more intentional in the way you start and end your day? Will you connect with like-minded women or change the way you respond to drama? No matter how large or small the nuggets of wisdom you received, keep on learning. Prison is the perfect opportunity for you to focus on your spiritual and behavioral health.

Now that you've completed Booklet 1 in this series, next up is Booklet 2: "[Boundaries and Healthy Relationships](#)." Read on to learn more about building trust, setting boundaries, and being vulnerable.

## End Notes

1. TerKeurst, Lysa. Twitter post. April 25, 2021. 7:33 p.m. <https://twitter.com/LysaTerKeurst/status/1386463300142223365>. Proverbs 31 Ministries is a Christian organization that uses multiple media outlets to minister to women around the world.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is quoted from *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*. NLT. copyright 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

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