Enhancing quality of life during early abstinence is a compelling strategy for reducing relapse. Gratitude practices have been shown to improve affect (Dickens, 2017; Krentzman et al., 2015).

Activity scheduling has been shown to promote enjoyment of daily activities (Daughters et al., 2008). Journaling helps express emotion leading to better health outcomes (Smyth, 1998).

**Introduction**

- Enhancing quality of life during early abstinence is a compelling strategy for reducing relapse.
- Gratitude practices have been shown to improve affect (Dickens, 2017; Krentzman et al., 2015).
- Activity scheduling has been shown to promote enjoyment of daily activities (Daughters et al., 2008).
- Journaling helps express emotion leading to better health outcomes (Smyth, 1998).

**Method**

- In-depth semi-structured interviews to ascertain perspectives of the journaling practice.
- The journaling practice was presented and briefly practiced by participants.
- Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and interpreted for relationships among themes.

**Questions We Asked**

1. What are your observations and thoughts about this journaling practice?
2. How can this practice be helpful to individuals in recovery, if at all?
3. What might be a downside to this practice, if any?

**Setting and Sample (N=33)**

- Rural counties, upper Midwestern USA
- 61% individuals in recovery, 15% treatment providers, 24% treatment providers in recovery; length of abstinence 11 days to 36 years (M=11 years, SD=13 years)
- 55% female
- 18-73 years of age (M=50 years, SD=16 years)
- 88% white, 12% other (black, Latino/a, multiracial)
- Education: 24% high school diploma, 27% bachelors degree, 9% masters degree
- Never married 36%, married 24%, divorced 30%

**Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall, the journaling practice was perceived to be feasible and acceptable...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptability</td>
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**...with two exceptions: writing and planning, which garnered mixed reviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Views of Writing</th>
<th>Negative Views of Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals felt writing was beneficial, you would “get it out of your head,” when you “write it down, you’ve released it”</td>
<td>A practitioner stated, “Just knowing how hard [homework is], this looks insurmountable,” similarly, an individual in recovery said, “It’s paperwork so it’s overwhelming.”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Views of Planning</th>
<th>Negative Views of Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning would help prioritize tasks... “I didn’t have time for my walk today, moving it up on the priority list”... and provide reminders: “it might remind me like, ‘well, why don’t you take two hours tomorrow and do [something joyful]?”</td>
<td>Planning might engender burdensome thoughts “I hate remembering what I have to do in my home” and could cause disappointment: “My fear would be, I’d start it and then wouldn’t follow through...it would feed into my negative thoughts; “I don’t want to set myself up for too many projects.” For some, “tomorrow” seemed uncertain: “I don’t know if I am going to...be able to...do things...because you don’t know if you are going to make it today.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion and Conclusions**

- For many, the journal would feel validating and function as a mirror, providing perspective on past, present, and future self.
- Increased awareness of the good and bad from “today” could inform intentions and planning for the future.
- Participants valued the ability to track the negative as well as the positive.
- For some clients, poor literacy might pose a significant obstacle.
- Planning for the future was disagreeable for some.
- Participants found the left side of the page (past 24 h review) more acceptable and feasible than the right side of the page (future planning).
- Standardized behavioral activation therapy for substance use, involving activity planning, has been found to be acceptable to participants with high rates of treatment retention (Daughters et al., 2008, 2017; Magidson, 2011). Further work should reconcile the difficulties found in the current study with previous research where similar tasks were more acceptable.
- Future work will examine the efficacy of integrating gratitude journaling into existing standardized behavioral activation therapy for substance use, namely LETS ACT (Daughters et al., 2008, 2017; Magidson, 2011).

**References**

