Introducing Overeaters Anonymous

In OA, Recovery is Possible
About Compulsive Eating and the OA Program of Recovery

Table of Contents

What Is Compulsive Eating?

What Is the Overeaters Anonymous Program of Recovery?

What Does OA Offer You?

How Do OA Members Describe Life as Compulsive Eaters?

An Inside View

There Is Help

Further Questions People Often Ask about the OA Program of Recovery

Questions about Weight and Dieting

Questions about Willpower, a Power Greater than Ourselves, and Religion

Questions about How to Work OA’s Program of Recovery

Questions about Becoming a Member of OA

Questions about OA as an Organization

Questions about the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of OA

A Program of Recovery

What OA offers you

What Is Compulsive Eating?

“Compulsion” is defined as an irresistible desire to take an often irrational action. The word “irresistible” means we are unable to resist the urge, no matter how many promises we have made to ourselves or others. In our case, we have the compulsion of being unable to control our eating behaviors to indulge repeatedly in destructive eating behaviors.

In OA, we believe compulsive overeating is a disease with physical, emotional, and spiritual components. A disease causes some aspect of the body to act abnormally. In our case, it’s the complex system that governs food behavior. The body mechanisms that allow normal eaters to push the plate away, or otherwise control their food behaviors, don’t function properly for us.

For some, the disease acts much like an alcohol or drug addiction; except in our case, certain foods or overeating itself is food, rather than drugs or alcohol, that stimulates an insatiable craving for more. The OA definition of compulsive eating covers all facets of unhealthy eating behaviors. It’s not only how much we eat or how much we weigh, but also the ways in which we try to control our food. Some of us hide our food and eat in secret. Some binge and purge, while others alternate between overeating and starvation. All compulsive eaters have one thing in common: whether we’re struggling with overeating, undereating, bingeing, purging, or starving ourselves, we are driven by forces we don’t understand to deal with food in irrational and self-destructive ways. Once compulsive eating as an illness has taken hold, an individual’s willpower alone cannot stop it. The power of choice over food is gone.
Only you can decide if you suffer from compulsive eating. Many of us have been told by family, friends, and even physicians that all we need is a little self-control and willpower to lose weight and eat normally. Believing this, we experienced frustrating periods of dieting and losing weight, only to regain all the weight and more: abnormal eating and fluctuation in weight.

Many of us have found the following questions useful to determine if we have a problem with compulsive eating:

1. Do I eat when I’m not hungry, or not eat when my body needs nourishment?
2. Do I go on eating binges for no apparent reason, sometimes eating until I’m stuffed or even feel sick?
3. Do I have feelings of guilt, shame, or embarrassment about my weight or the way I eat?
4. Do I eat sensibly in front of others and then make up for it when I am alone?
5. Is my eating affecting my health or the way I live my life?
6. When my emotions are intense—whether positive or negative—do I find myself reaching for food?
7. Do my eating behaviors make me or others unhappy?
8. Have I ever used laxatives, vomiting, diuretics, excessive exercise, diet pills, shots, or other medical interventions (including surgery) to try to control my weight?
9. Do I fast or severely restrict my food intake to control my weight?
10. Do I fantasize about how much better life would be if I were a different size or weight?
11. Do I need to chew or have something in my mouth all the time: food, gum, mints, candies, or beverages?
12. Have I ever eaten food that is burned, frozen, or spoiled; from containers in the grocery store; or out of the garbage?
13. Are there certain foods I can’t stop eating after having the first bite?
14. Have I lost weight with a diet or “period of control” only to be followed by bouts of uncontrolled eating and/or weight gain?
15. Do I spend too much time thinking about food, arguing with myself about whether or what to eat, planning the next diet or exercise cure, or counting calories?

Have If you answered “yes” to several of these questions? If so, it is possible that you have, or are well on your way to having, a compulsive eating or overeating problem. We in OA have found discovered that the way to arrest this disease is to practice illness can be arrested—though never completely cured—if a person is willing to follow the Twelve Step recovery program of Overeaters Anonymous that has proven successful for countless numbers of us. We believe that compulsive overeating is a progressive illness from which we can have freedom, one day at a time. Whether OA will work for a specific individual you depends on his or her sincere desire to stop compulsive food behavior and your willingness to take the actions suggested in the program. The OA recovery process is one of action.

What Is the Overeaters Anonymous Program of Recovery?

OA Overeaters Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women individuals who meet to share their our experience, strength, and hope with each other to solve their common problem and help those who still suffer to as we recover from compulsive overeating and other compulsive food behaviors. PURPOSE OF OA Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors and to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps of OA to those who still suffer.

The Twelve Steps are the heart of the OA recovery program. They offer a new way of life that enables the compulsive overeater to live without the need for excess or insufficient food. The Steps are suggestions only, based on the experience of recovering OA members. Members who make an earnest effort to follow these Steps and to apply them in daily living get far more out of OA than do those members who merely come to meetings and don’t do the serious emotional and spiritual work involved in the Steps. The ideas expressed in the Twelve Steps, which originated in with Alcoholics Anonymous, reflect practical
experience and application of physical, emotional, and spiritual insights, as recorded by thinkers throughout many ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work! They enable compulsive eaters to lead happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which OA has been built.

Here are the Twelve Steps, which are suggested as a program of recovery for compulsive overeaters of Overeaters Anonymous:

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Permission to use the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services, Inc.

 REQUIREMENT FOR MEMBERSHIP
As Tradition Three states, “The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.”

COST FOR MEMBERSHIP
There are no dues or fees for members. We are self-supporting through our own contributions, neither soliciting nor accepting outside donations.

What Does OA Offer You?
Belonging to the OA Fellowship and working the Twelve Steps yields these priceless gifts:

Acceptance—OA offers us acceptance as we are now, as we were, and as we will be.

Understanding—In OA, there is understanding of the common problems we face.

Communication—We identify with each other and communication becomes the natural result of our mutual understanding and acceptance.

Relief—OA offers relief from the problem of compulsive eating through the solution offered in the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous.
Power—Practice of OA’s Twelve Step recovery program grants us power through a spiritual awakening, which results in a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves. We gain a greater acceptance and understanding of ourselves and gain the support and companionship of our OA Fellowship. A door is opened to a new way of life.

**IS OA FOR YOU?**
Only you can decide that question. If OA is for you, no one else can make this decision for you. Remember, we realize that there is no shame in admitting that you have a problem; the most important thing is to do something about it.

Many of us have found the following questions useful to help determine if we have an eating problem: with compulsive eating:

1. Do I eat when I'm not hungry, or not eat when my body needs nourishment?
2. Do I go on eating binges for no apparent reason, sometimes eating until I’m stuffed or even feel sick?
3. Do I have feelings of guilt, shame, or embarrassment about my weight or the way I eat?
4. Do I eat sensibly in front of others and then make up for it when I am alone?
5. Is my eating affecting my health or the way I live my life?
6. When my emotions are intense—whether positive or negative—do I find myself reaching for food?
7. Do my eating behaviors make me or others unhappy?
8. Have I ever used laxatives, vomiting, diuretics, excessive exercise, diet pills, shots, or other medical interventions (including surgery) to try to control my weight?
9. Do I fast or severely restrict my food intake to control my weight?
10. Do I fantasize about how much better life would be if I were a different size or weight?
11. Do I need to chew or have something in my mouth all the time: food, gum, mints, candies, or beverages?
12. Have I ever eaten food that is burned, frozen, or spoiled; from containers in the grocery store; or out of the garbage?
13. Are there certain foods I can’t stop eating after having the first bite?
14. Have I lost weight with a diet or “period of control” only to be followed by bouts of uncontrolled eating and/or weight gain?
15. Do I spend too much time thinking about food, arguing with myself about whether or what to eat, planning the next diet or exercise cure, or counting calories?

Have you answered “yes” to several of these questions? If so, it is possible that you have, or are well on your way to having a compulsive eating or overeating problem. We have found that the way to arrest this disease is to practice the Twelve Step recovery program of

**Overeaters Anonymous.**

Visit the OA website at [www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org) or contact the World Service Office at 505-891-2664. Many local telephone directories also include listings for Overeaters Anonymous.

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COMPULSIVE OVEREATING—AN INSIDE VIEW
The various manifestations of compulsive overeating

How Do OA Members Describe Life as Compulsive Eaters?

Introduction

The following passage describes how compulsive overeaters experience the various manifestations of compulsive eating. The passage was taken from the book The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition (pp. 9–12) and is offered here to professionals, newcomers, and other interested persons anyone who wants to know more about us and our behavior.

An Inside View

When we look with complete honesty at our lives, we see that where eating is concerned we have acted in an extremely irrational and self-destructive manner. Under the compulsion to overeat, many of us have done things no sane person would think of doing. We have driven miles in the dead of night to satisfy a craving for food. We have eaten food that was frozen, burnt, stale, or even dangerously spoiled. We have eaten food off other people’s plates, off the floor, and off the ground. We have dug food out of the garbage and eaten it.

We have frequently lied about what we have eaten—lied to ourselves and to others because we didn’t want to face the truth about what we do when it comes to food. We have stolen food from our friends, families, and employers, as well as from the grocery store. We have also stolen money to buy food. We have eaten beyond the point of being full, beyond the point of being sick of eating. We have continued to overeat, knowing all the while we were disfiguring and maiming our bodies. We have isolated ourselves to eat, damaging our relationships and denying ourselves full social lives. Because of our compulsive eating, we have turned ourselves into objects of ridicule and we have destroyed our health.

Then, horrified by what we were doing to ourselves with food, we became obsessed with diets. . . . We spent lots of money on weight-loss schemes; we bought all sorts of appetite suppressants; we joined diet clubs and fitness centers; we had ourselves hypnotized and analyzed; we had major surgery on our digestive systems; we had our ears stapled or our jaws wired shut. All of this we did willingly, hoping we could still eat all we wanted and be free of the compulsion.

Some of us went from doctor to doctor looking for a cure. The doctors gave us diets, but we had no better success with those than with the other diets we’d been on. The doctors prescribed shots and pills. Those worked for a while, but we inevitably lost control and overate again, putting back on the weight we had worked so hard to lose and frequently gaining more.

Many of us tried fasting, with and without a doctor’s supervision. Usually we lost weight, but as soon as we started eating again, the compulsive eating behavior returned, along with the weight. Some of us learned to purge ourselves with vomiting, laxatives, or excessive exercise. We damaged our digestive systems and our teeth while we starved our bodies of the nutrients we needed to live. Some of us were so terrified of gaining weight, we went to great lengths to
restrict what we ate. We refused to eat certain foods, we developed complex rituals around food, and we tried to avoid eating whenever possible. Other people told us we were too thin, but we thought they were overreacting. Our weight went down, sometimes to dangerous levels, but we still felt fat.

Most of us got plenty of advice from others about how to get to our “ideal” size, but nothing permanently solved our problem. We found that no matter what we did to ease our turmoil, our compulsive eating behavior eventually returned. Over time, we became weary and discouraged from battling with weight, and our self-esteem went down. Still, we could never accept our powerlessness. The prospect of being obese, sick, and out of control for the rest of our lives led some of us to conclude that life was simply not worth living. Many of us thought about suicide. Some of us tried it.

Most of us, however, never reached suicidal desperation. Instead we took comfort in a feeling that everything was all right as long as we got enough to eat. The only trouble was that, as our compulsive eating progressed, we ate more and more, yet we were never satisfied. Instead of bringing comfort, the overeating backfired. The more we ate, the more we suffered, yet we continued to overeat. Our true insanity could be seen in the fact that we kept right on trying to find comfort in excess food, long after it began to cause us misery.

Once we honestly looked at our lives, it became easy for us to admit we had acted insanely where food and weight were concerned. Many of us, however, were able to confine our compulsive overeating to the hours when we were alone and to carry on with relatively normal lives. We worked hard during the day and ate hard at night. Surely we were sane in most respects.

More self-examination revealed many areas in which our lives were out of balance. We had to admit that we had not acted sanely when we responded to our children’s needs for attention by yelling at them, or when we were jealous of our mates. Too much of the time we had lived in fear and anxiety. More comfortable with food than with people, we sometimes limited our social lives. We closed the curtains, stopped answering the phone, and hid in the house.

When we were around other people, we smiled and agreed when we really wanted to say no. Some of us were unable to stand up for ourselves in abusive relationships; we felt we deserved the abuse. Or, we focused on others’ faults and thought for hours about what they should do to solve their problems, while our own problems went unsolved.

Compulsive eaters are often people of extremes. We overreacted to slight provocations while ignoring the real issues in our lives. We were obsessively busy, then we were exhausted and unable to act. We were wildly excited then deeply depressed. We saw the whole world in black and white. If we couldn’t have it all, we didn’t want any; if we couldn’t be the best, we didn’t want to participate.

Little by little, we saw how much pain our way of living was causing us. Gradually, we came to believe we needed to change.

There Is Help

If you have identified with the description in this pamphlet of the compulsive eater, we will welcome you. You may still have questions. After reading this pamphlet, you may still have questions.
We encourage you to attend an OA meeting, where members will be happy to welcome you and give you further information and help. You can find meetings in your area—and also as well as online or telephone meetings—by visiting our website at OA.org or by contacting the World Service Office at 1-505-891-2664, the address and/or phone number on the back of this pamphlet. If you know of someone who might benefit from this program suggest that he or she contact Overeaters Anonymous.

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INTRODUCING
OVERSEATERS ANONYMOUS

Further Questions and Answers People Often Ask about the OA Program of Recovery

About compulsive eating and the OA program of recovery

Since OA began in January 1960, many people—compulsive and normal eaters alike—have sought answers to questions about Overeaters Anonymous and its program of recovery.

This section pamphlet provides answers to many of the specific questions that have been asked.

After reading this pamphlet, you may still have questions. If so, we encourage you to attend an OA meeting, where members will be happy to welcome you and give you further information and help. You can find meetings in your area—and also online or telephone meetings—by visiting our web site at www.oa.org or by contacting the World Service Office at the address and phone number on the back of this pamphlet.

What is compulsive eating?

“Compulsion” is defined as an irresistible desire to take an often irrational action. The word “irresistible” means we are unable to resist the urge, no matter how many promises we have made to ourselves or others. In our case, we have the compulsion of being unable to control our eating behaviors.

In OA, we believe compulsive overeating is a disease with physical, emotional and spiritual components. A disease causes some aspect of the body to malfunction. In our case, it’s the complex system that governs food behavior. The body mechanisms that allow normal eaters to push the plate away, or otherwise control their food behaviors, don’t function properly for us.

For some, the disease acts much like an alcohol or drug addiction: except in our case, certain foods or overeating itself stimulate an insatiable craving for more. The OA definition of compulsive eating covers all facets of unhealthy eating behaviors. It’s not only how much we eat or how much we weigh, but the ways in which we try to control our food. Some of us hide our food and eat in secret. Some binge and purge, while others alternate between overeating and starvation. All compulsive eaters have one thing in common: no matter whether we’re struggling with overeating, undereating, binging, purging or starving ourselves, we are driven by forces we don’t understand to deal with food in irrational and self-destructive ways. Once
compulsive eating as an illness has taken hold, an individual’s willpower cannot stop it. The power of choice over food is gone.

We in OA have discovered that this illness can be arrested—though never completely cured—if a person is willing to follow the program that has proven successful for countless numbers of us. Whether OA will work for a specific individual depends on his or her sincere desire to stop compulsive food behavior and a willingness to take the actions suggested in the program. The OA recovery process is one of action.

**How can I tell if I am a compulsive overeater?**

Only you can decide.

Many of us have been told by family, friends, and even physicians that all we need is a little self-control and willpower to lose weight and eat normally. Believing this, we experienced frustrating periods of dieting and losing weight, only to regain all the weight and more. We finally turned to OA because we felt our eating habits had us beaten, and we were ready to try anything to be freed from our self-destructive eating behaviors.

Others with little weight to lose, even those at normal weight or with only a few years of compulsive eating behind them, have also turned to OA. We have discovered enough about compulsive eating to recognize that it is a progressive illness.

In OA, compulsive overeaters are described as people whose eating habits have caused growing and continuing problems in their lives. Only the individuals involved can say whether food has become an unmanageable problem.

**Questions about Weight and Dieting**

**Must I be a certain amount over my normal weight to come to OA? Is there a weight requirement to come to OA?**

No. OA works for almost anyone who wants to stop eating compulsively, no matter what size the individual may be. Some people who come into OA have already attained a healthy body weight; others may be underweight. There are as many degrees of weight as there are many types of OA members, ranging from underweight or normal weight to those who have hundreds of pounds or kilos to lose. We turn to OA to find a way of life where we can live comfortably without returning to compulsive eating habits.

There are as many degrees of weight as there are OA members, ranging from underweight or normal weight to those who have hundreds of pounds/kilos to lose. Whatever our weight, all who have a desire to stop eating compulsively have equal advantages in coming to Overeaters Anonymous. Our common bond is stated in Step One: “We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.” We turn to OA to find a way of life where we can live comfortably without returning to compulsive eating habits.

I’ve failed at every diet. How can OA prevent these “slips”?*

No one fails in OA. As long as a person is willing to work the OA program, recovery is possible.
“Slips” into compulsive overeating do not need to happen in OA, but some of us experience them. Although slips may sometimes be brief, they can also lead to eating binges and weight gain. Whenever a slip occurs, members are encouraged to reach for all the help available to them through OA.

We who have been through these periods can often trace a slip to specific causes. We may have forgotten we were compulsive overeaters and become overconfident. Or we may have let ourselves become too preoccupied with business or social personal affairs to remember the importance of abstaining from compulsive overeating. Or we may have let ourselves become tired, letting down our mental and emotional defenses. Whatever the cause of a slip, the solution can be found through practicing the Twelve Step recovery program of Overeaters Anonymous.

**Will OA help me with a diet?**

For those who seek help with a diet, OA recommends consulting a qualified professional. The OA program enables compulsive eaters to abstain from excess food as well as the specific foods that lead to compulsive eating, one day at a time. Overeaters Anonymous, therefore, supports any member who wants to follow a professional’s nutritional advice.

OA is not a diet club. We recover by practicing the OA Twelve Step program for physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery. We find, among other things, freedom from food obsession, power to act rationally in difficult situations, and a better way to live.

For more information on plans of eating and examples of plans some members have found successful, see the pamphlets *A Plan of Eating* and *Dignity of Choice*.

**Can OA help me if I am bulimic or anorexic?**

Yes. All who struggle with compulsive food behaviors are welcomed in love and fellowship. Overeaters Anonymous supports each person’s efforts to recover and accepts any member who desires to stop eating compulsively. When individuals ask about medical matters, OA always recommends they seek professional advice.

**If I have a thyroid condition or a water retention problem, how can OA help me?**

OA recommends that persons who need help with a specific medical condition, such as a thyroid disorder or water retention, consult a qualified physician. OA does not give medical advice.

We who have suffered with similar medical problems find that the OA program enables us to follow a doctor’s recommendations with less difficulty.

**Do you advise taking appetite-suppressant medication during weight reduction?**

Overeaters Anonymous does not advise on any medical matters. Those of us in recovery have found we develop strong inner resources by working the Twelve Steps. By relying upon a Power greater than ourselves, we find continued success in abstaining from compulsive overeating.

**Am I welcome in OA if I have had weight-loss surgery or if I am considering it?**

Overeaters Anonymous welcomes anyone with a desire to stop eating compulsively, including those who have had bariatric surgery or are contemplating it.
Questions about Willpower, a Power Greater than Ourselves, and Religion

Can’t a compulsive overeater just use willpower to stop excessive eating?

Before turning to OA, many of us tried with all our might to control our food intake and change our eating habits. Usually we tried many methods: drastic diets, appetite suppressants or stimulants pills, diuretics, and injections of one kind or another. In other cases, we also tried dieting “gimmicks”: eating only at mealtimes, cutting food portions in half, never eating desserts, eating everything but sweets, never eating in secret, splurging only on weekends, skipping breakfast, never eating standing up... the list could go on forever.

Of course, each time we tried something new, we made a solemn oath “to stick to the diet this time and never go off it again.” When we could never keep these promises, we inevitably felt guilt and remorse. Through such experiences, many of us have finally admitted lacking willpower to change our eating habits. When we came into OA, we admitted we were powerless over food. If our willpower didn’t work, it followed that we needed a Power greater than ourselves to help us recover. We were powerless, but not helpless.

What is meant by “a Power greater than ourselves”?

Before coming to OA, most of us had already realized we couldn’t control our eating. Food had become a power greater than ourselves. Somewhere in the progression of our food problem, we found that food began to take over our lives. In essence, we had become slaves defenseless to our compulsion. Food had become a Power greater than ourselves.

OA experience has taught us that to achieve abstinence from compulsive eating and maintain recovery, we need to accept and rely upon another a Higher Power, which we acknowledge is greater than ourselves. Some of us consider our group or OA itself as a Power greater than ourselves. Some of us adopt the concept of God, as we individually understand and interpret God. However we choose to interpret a Power greater than ourselves is fine. There are no right or wrong concepts. What’s important to our recovery from compulsive eating is that we define and develop a relationship with this Higher Power. The focus and intent of the OA program is to help us do this.

Is OA a religious society?

No. OA is not a religious society since because it requires no definite religious belief as a condition of membership. OA has among its membership people of many religious traditions, as well as atheists and agnostics.

The OA recovery program is based on acceptance of certain spiritual values. We are free to interpret these values as we think best, or not to think about them at all if we so choose.

When we first came to OA, many of us had definite reservations about accepting any concept of a Power greater than ourselves. OA experience has shown that those who keep an open mind on this subject and continue coming to OA meetings will not find it too difficult to work out a personal solution to this very personal matter.

Questions about How to Work OA’s Program of Recovery

What is a sponsor?
Sponsorship is an essential tool of the program, and it helps OA members achieve and then maintain their abstinence. Sponsorship is based on mutual trust and honesty. If you are coming back from relapse, it will help your program to have a sponsor.

Sponsors are OA members committed to abstinence, who are living the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability and are willing to share their recovery with other members of the Fellowship. We ask a sponsor to help guide us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional, and spiritual. To find a sponsor, ask someone who has what you want and ask how he or she is achieving it.

What does abstinence mean? Recovery?

The definitions of “abstinence” and “recovery” in Overeaters Anonymous are:

1. Abstinence: The act of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight.
2. Recovery: Removal of the need to engage in compulsive eating behaviors.

Spiritual, emotional, and physical recovery is achieved through working and living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve Step program.

Can I stop eating compulsively on my own just through reading OA literature?

OA literature is a powerful tool that helps members learn more about the disease and helps us to stop eating compulsively, one day at a time. However, the OA program works best for the individual those who recognizes and accepts that they can’t stop eating compulsively on their own and that it is a program involving other people. We have found that communicating with other members is essential for us to stop eating compulsively.

Attending OA meetings and associating with others who suffer in a similar manner brings us hope and awareness. Because we are neither judged nor ridiculed, we can share our past experiences, present problems, and future hopes with those who understand and support us. Working with other compulsive overeaters, we no longer feel lonely and misunderstood. Instead, we feel needed and accepted at last.

OA members whose living situations or health problems prevent attendance at face-to-face meetings can attend online, or telephone, or non-real-time meetings. We also find that reading OA literature and communicating with other members helps us to stop eating compulsively.

I live in a small town or area where there are no OA meetings. Is there still a way I can belong?

Of course! OA meetings are available in many different forms to meet the varied needs of our members. Overeaters Anonymous has approximately 6,500 meetings in more than eighty countries. Use the Find a Meeting feature on the oa.org website to find a face-to-face, telephone, or online meeting.

To be registered with the World Service Organization, OA meetings must fulfill the definition of an OA group, which means they meet to practice the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of OA, welcome all who have the desire to stop eating compulsively, do not require members to practice any actions to remain a member or to share at a meeting, and as a group, have no affiliation other than OA.

If you aren’t able to find a meeting in your city, one that is within a convenient driving distance, or one that meets your specific needs, please consider attending an online or a telephone-meeting, or select the Find Service Body tab on the Find a Meeting page. Service bodies are OA offices located in most urban areas. These offices are usually staffed by volunteer OA members who will be happy to answer your questions and assist you in finding a meeting, or help you get a meeting started in your area.
What is does the “Just for today” idea mean?

We use the phrase “Just for today” to describe a basic approach to recovery from compulsive eating. We don’t say we can never take another compulsive bite for as long as we live. We don’t promise ourselves not to eat compulsively “tomorrow” or “for the rest of the week.” We have learned these promises never worked anyway, and the compulsion to overeat proved more powerful than our best intentions not to do so.

OA members realize that the current twenty-four hours is the only period we can do anything about. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow isn’t here yet. “But today,” an OA member says, “I will not deviate from my program of recovery. I may be tempted to overeat compulsively tomorrow, but tomorrow is something to face when it comes. Today is all that matters.”

Many other simple ideas expressed in OA slogans or sayings help shape and improve our attitude toward the challenges of daily living. Adopting these ways of thinking helps us deal with life without turning to food.

Some useful sayings include “One day at a time” (related to “Just for today”); “First things first” (setting priorities); “Easy does it” (balance trust); “Live and let live” (tolerance); “HALT” (don’t get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired); and “Let go and let God” (let go of fear and worry and let Higher Power handle it).

The OA program is simple, but it is not easy. To recover from one of the most baffling addictions requires diligent effort. Self-honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness are the keys that open the door to recovery.

Questions about Becoming a Member of OA

How does an individual join OA?

No one “joins” OA in the usual sense of the word. There are no membership applications to fill out; no membership cards, dues, or fees. Once we have heard about OA and believe we have an eating problem, we simply attend OA meetings of our choice.

OA members don’t have to attend any set number of meetings during a given time period. Some members may attend one meeting a week while others prefer to attend more often. The kindly reminder to “Keep coming back” is based on the experience that our recovery suffers when we stay away from meetings for too long.

Must members go to meetings for the rest of their lives?

No one has to do anything in OA. There is always a choice between doing and not doing, including the vital choice of whether or not to seek recovery through OA. Believing that compulsive overeating is incurable, but that it can be arrested if we take certain actions, the vast majority of us find it important to attend meetings regularly in order to be relieved of the compulsion. Many of us believe that when sanity has been restored, our continued attendance at meetings is not only a way to maintain our sanity, but also a way to do service in support of new members, helping others find relief from compulsive eating.

What are the requirements for OA membership?
The OA Third Tradition states: “The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.” Nothing else is asked or demanded of anyone. The acceptance and practice of the OA recovery program rests entirely with the individual.

**How much does OA membership cost?**

There are no financial obligations of any kind in connection with OA membership. Our recovery program is available to all who want to stop eating compulsively, regardless of personal financial situations. While there are no dues or fees for members, according to Tradition Seven we are fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. Members may make a Seventh Tradition contribution when they attend meetings, either face-to-face, by telephone, or virtually.

**How does OA support itself?**

OA is entirely self-supporting through membership contributions and literature sales. No outside donations are accepted. Most local groups “pass the basket” at meetings to cover the cost of rent, literature and meeting expenses, and to support OA as a whole. Meetings keep enough money to meet their own expenses and send the balance to their intergroup or service board, their regional office and the World Service Office. The financing of all OA service bodies depends on these regular contributions from meetings.

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**Questions about OA as an Organization**

**What is the OA World Service Office (WSO)?**

WSO is a service center whose main function is to carry the OA message on a broad level to the many compulsive overeaters who still suffer.

The World Service Office publishes OA literature, including *Lifeline*, the OA magazine of recovery. WSO also mails regular regularly with service bodies, providing a link among them and keeping them informed about matters of concern to OA as a whole. In order to maintain these vital contacts, WSO keeps up-to-date records on all registered groups and service bodies, and periodically issues revised meeting directories provides a complete listing of all OA meetings around the world.

The World Service Office also acts as a public information clearinghouse, answering requests from media representatives, health professionals and others interested in compulsive eating and the OA program.

The World Service Office contact information can be found on the back of this pamphlet.

**Who runs OA?**

Volunteers! OA is truly unusual in that it has no central government and a minimum of formal organization. It has no officers or executives who wield power or authority over the Fellowship or individual members.
In even the most informal organization, however, certain jobs obviously need to be done. For example, in local groups someone has to arrange for the meeting place, account for group finances, make sure adequate OA literature is available, and keep in touch with local, regional, and international service centers. On the international level, people must be responsible for the maintenance and smooth functioning of the World Service Office.

All of this means that OA at the local, regional, and international levels needs responsible people to perform certain duties. It is important to understand that these members perform services only. They make no individual decisions and issue no individual judgments affecting other groups or OA as a whole. Persons who accept these responsibilities are directly accountable to those they serve, and service jobs periodically rotate among members.

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**Questions about the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of OA**

**What is the Twelve Step recovery program?**

The Twelve Steps are the heart of the OA recovery program. The Twelve Steps offer a new way of life that enables the compulsive overeaters to live without the need for excess food and foods that cause us to eat compulsively. The Steps are suggestions only, based on the experience of recovering OA members. Members who make an earnest effort to follow these Steps and apply them in daily living get far more out of OA than do those members who merely come to meetings and don’t do the serious emotional and spiritual work involved in the Steps. The Twelve Steps are listed in an earlier section of this pamphlet titled **What Is the Overeaters Anonymous Program of Recovery?**
The ideas expressed in the Twelve Steps, which originated in Alcoholics Anonymous, reflect practical experience and application of physical, emotional and spiritual insights as recorded by thinkers throughout many ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work! They enable compulsive eaters to lead happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which OA has been built.

Here are the Twelve Steps, which are suggested as a program of recovery for compulsive overeaters:

**The Twelve Steps**

1. We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Permission to use the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services, Inc.

What is meant by “sanity” as used in the Twelve Steps?

The word sanity derives from the Latin word “sanus,” meaning “sound, healthy.” The word sanity as used in OA means “sound or rational thinking and acting.”

Most of us admit to irrational behavior, including our attempts to control food and other areas of our lives. A person with sound thinking would not repeatedly engage in self-destructive behaviors. A person with sound thinking would not repeatedly take actions that had not worked previously and expect different results. The words “restore us to sanity” in Step Two does not imply that compulsive eaters are mentally deranged, but that where our actions and feelings toward food and other areas of our lives are concerned, sanity cannot be claimed. By turning to OA and expressing a desire to return to rational behavior, we are taking a step toward achieving sanity.

What are the Twelve Traditions?

The Twelve Traditions are to the OA groups what the Twelve Steps are to the individual. The Twelve Traditions are a means by which OA remains unified in a common cause. They are suggested principles to ensure the smooth functioning, survival, and growth of the many groups which comprise Overeaters Anonymous.

Like the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions have their origins in Alcoholics Anonymous. These Traditions describe attitudes which those early AA members believed were important to group survival and which have proven to be effective.
OA members ensure group unity—which is so essential to individual recovery—by practicing the attitudes suggested by the following Twelve Traditions:

**The Twelve Traditions**

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.
6. An OA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. OA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

*Permission to use the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services, Inc.*

**Why does OA place such emphasis upon “anonymity”?**

Anonymity at the most basic level says we don’t disclose the identities of individual members, their personal situations, or what they share in confidence at meetings, online, or on the phone with us. This makes OA a safe place where we can be honest with ourselves and others. It allows us to express ourselves freely at meetings and in conversation, and it safeguards us from gossip. Of course, we as individuals have the right to make our own membership known and, in fact, must do this if we are to carry the message to other compulsive eaters (part of Step Twelve). We don’t use anonymity to limit our effectiveness within the Fellowship. For example, it’s fine to use our full names within our group or OA service body. The concept of anonymity helps us focus on principles rather than personalities.

Anonymity is also vital at the public level of press, radio, films, television, and other public media of communication. By keeping our members anonymous at the media public level, we help ensure that egotism and self-glorification will do not adversely affect the OA Fellowship.

Humility is fundamental to anonymity. In practicing these principles and in giving up personal distinction for the common good, OA members ensure that the unity of Overeaters Anonymous will continue. According to the First Tradition, “personal recovery depends upon OA unity”... and anonymity is essential to the preservation of that unity.

**WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION? OTHER OA PUBLICATIONS**
PAMPHLETS

A Plan of Eating
A Program of Recovery
About OA
A Commitment to Abstinence
Before You Take That First Compulsive Bite, Remember …
Dignity of Choice
Is Food a Problem for You?
To the Family of the Compulsive Overeater
To the Man Who Wants to Stop Compulsive Overeating, Welcome
To the Newcomer
To the Teen

BOOKS

Abstinence
A New Beginning
Beyond Our Wildest Dreams
For Today
Lifeline Sampler
Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition
Seeking the Spiritual Path
The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous
Voices of Recovery

PERIODICALS

A Step Ahead newsletter for members and groups
Lifeline, OA’s international magazine of recovery
The Courier newsletter for professionals

This is a partial list of OA has a wide variety of publications, including pamphlets, books, and periodicals that provide much more information than we are able to provide here. A complete list of the available publications and order forms are available in our bookstore at oa.org, or can be obtained from the World Service Office.

How to find OA
Visit the OA website at www.oa.org,
or contact the World Service Office at 1-505-891-2664.
Many local telephone directories also include local listings for Overeaters Anonymous.

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