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29 **What Is Compulsive Eating?**
30

31 “Compulsion” is defined as an irresistible desire to take an often irrational action. The word “irresistible”
32 means we are unable to resist the urge, no matter how many promises we have made to ourselves or others.
33 In our case, we have the compulsion of ~~being unable to control our eating behaviors.~~ to indulge repeatedly
34 in destructive eating behaviors.
35

36 In OA, we believe compulsive ~~overeating~~ overeating is a disease with physical, emotional, and spiritual components.
37 A disease causes some aspect of the body to ~~act abnormally malfunction.~~ act abnormally malfunction. In our case, it’s the complex
38 system that governs food behavior. The body mechanisms that allow normal eaters to push the plate away,
39 or otherwise control their food behaviors, don’t function properly for us.
40

41 For some, the disease acts much like an alcohol or drug addiction; except in our case, ~~certain foods or~~
42 ~~overeating itself~~ it is food, rather than drugs or alcohol, that stimulates an insatiable-craving for more. The
43 OA definition of compulsive eating covers all facets of unhealthy eating behaviors. It’s not only how much
44 we eat or how much we weigh, but also the ways in which we try to control our food. Some of us hide our
45 food and eat in secret. Some binge and purge, while others alternate between overeating and starvation. All
46 compulsive eaters have one thing in common: whether we’re struggling with overeating, undereating,
47 bingeing, purging, or starving ourselves, we are driven by forces we don’t understand to deal with food in
48 irrational and self-destructive ways. Once compulsive eating as an illness has taken hold, an individual’s
49 willpower alone cannot stop it. The power of choice over food is gone.
50

51 Only you can decide if you suffer from compulsive eating. Many of us have been told by family, friends,
52 and even physicians that all we need is a little self-control and willpower to ~~lose weight and~~ eat normally.
53 Believing this, we experienced frustrating periods of ~~dieting and losing weight, only to regain all the weight~~
54 ~~and more:~~ abnormal eating and fluctuation in weight.

55
56 Many of us have found the following questions useful to determine if we have a problem with compulsive
57 eating:

- 58
- 59 1. Do I eat when I'm not hungry, or not eat when my body needs nourishment?
 - 60 2. Do I go on eating binges for no apparent reason, sometimes eating until I'm stuffed or even feel sick?
 - 61 3. Do I have feelings of guilt, shame, or embarrassment about my weight or the way I eat?
 - 62 4. Do I eat sensibly in front of others and then make up for it when I am alone?
 - 63 5. Is my eating affecting my health or the way I live my life?
 - 64 6. When my emotions are intense—whether positive or negative—do I find myself reaching for food?
 - 65 7. Do my eating behaviors make me or others unhappy?
 - 66 8. Have I ever used laxatives, vomiting, diuretics, excessive exercise, diet pills, shots, or other medical
67 interventions (including surgery) to try to control my weight?
 - 68 9. Do I fast or severely restrict my food intake to control my weight?
 - 69 10. Do I fantasize about how much better life would be if I were a different size or weight?
 - 70 11. Do I need to chew or have something in my mouth all the time: food, gum, mints, candies, or beverages?
 - 71 12. Have I ever eaten food that is burned, frozen, or spoiled; from containers in the grocery store; or out of
72 the garbage?
 - 73 13. Are there certain foods I can't stop eating after having the first bite?
 - 74 14. Have I lost weight with a diet or "period of control" only to be followed by bouts of uncontrolled eating
75 and/or weight gain?
 - 76 15. Do I spend too much time thinking about food, arguing with myself about whether or what to eat,
77 planning the next diet or exercise cure, or counting calories?

78
79 ~~Have~~ If you answered "yes" to several of these questions? ~~If so,~~ it is possible that you have, or are well on
80 your way to having, a compulsive eating or overeating problem. We in OA have ~~found~~ discovered that ~~the~~
81 ~~way to arrest this disease is to practice~~ illness can be arrested—though never completely cured—if a person
82 is willing to follow the Twelve Step recovery program of Overeaters Anonymous that has proven successful
83 for countless numbers of us. We believe that compulsive ~~overeating~~ is a progressive illness from which we
84 can have freedom, one day at a time. Whether OA will work for ~~a specific individual~~ you depends on ~~his~~
85 ~~or her~~ your sincere desire to stop compulsive food behavior and your willingness to take the actions
86 suggested in the program. The OA recovery process is one of action.

87 88 **What Is the Overeaters Anonymous Program of Recovery?**

89
90 ~~OA~~ Overeaters Anonymous is a Fellowship of ~~men and women~~ individuals who meet to share ~~their our~~
91 experience, strength, and hope ~~with each other to solve their common problem and help those who still~~
92 ~~suffer to~~ as we recover, from compulsive overeating and other compulsive food behaviors. **PURPOSE OF**
93 **OA** Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors and to carry
94 the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps of OA to those who still suffer.

95
96 The Twelve Steps are the heart of the OA recovery program. They offer a new way of life that enables the
97 compulsive ~~overeater~~ to live without the need for excess or insufficient food. ~~The Steps are suggestions~~
98 ~~only, based on the experience of recovering OA members. Members who make an earnest effort to follow~~
99 ~~these Steps and to apply them in daily living get far more out of OA than do those members who merely~~
100 ~~come to meetings and don't do the serious emotional and spiritual work involved in the Steps.~~ The ideas
101 expressed in the Twelve Steps, which originated in-with Alcoholics Anonymous, reflect practical

102 experience and application of physical, emotional, and spiritual insights, as recorded by thinkers throughout
103 many ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work! They enable compulsive eaters to lead
104 happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which OA has been built.

105
106 ~~Here These are the Twelve Steps , which are suggested as a program of recovery for compulsive overeaters~~
107 of Overeaters Anonymous:

108 109 **The Twelve Steps**

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

125
126 *Permission to use the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services,*
127 *Inc.*

128 129 **REQUIREMENT FOR MEMBERSHIP**

130 ~~As Tradition Three states, “The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating~~
131 ~~compulsively.”~~

132 133 **COST FOR MEMBERSHIP**

134 ~~There are no dues or fees for members. We are self supporting through our own contributions, neither~~
135 ~~soliciting nor accepting outside donations.~~

136 137 **What Does OA Offer You?**

138
139 Belonging to the OA Fellowship and working the Twelve Steps yields these priceless gifts:

140
141 **Acceptance**—OA offers us acceptance as we are now, as we were, and as we will be.

142
143 **Understanding**—In OA, there is understanding of the common problems we face.

144
145 **Communication**—We identify with each other and communication becomes the natural result of our
146 mutual understanding and acceptance.

147
148 **Relief**—OA offers relief from the problem of compulsive eating through the solution offered in the Twelve
149 Steps of Overeaters Anonymous.

150

151 **Power**—Practice of OA’s Twelve Step recovery program grants us power through a spiritual awakening,
152 which results in a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves. We gain a greater acceptance and
153 understanding of ourselves and gain the support and companionship of our OA Fellowship. A door is
154 opened to a new way of life.

155
156 **IS OA FOR YOU?**

157 Only you can decide that question. if OA is for you, no one else can make this decision for you. Remember,
158 We realize that there is no shame in admitting that you we have a problem; the most important thing is to
159 do something about it.

160
161 Many of us have found the following questions useful to help determine if we have an eating problem: with
162 compulsive eating:

163
164 Many of us have found the following questions useful to determine if we have a problem with compulsive
165 eating:

- 166
- 167 1. Do I eat when I’m not hungry, or not eat when my body needs nourishment?
- 168 2. Do I go on eating binges for no apparent reason, sometimes eating until I’m stuffed or even feel sick?
- 169 3. Do I have feelings of guilt, shame, or embarrassment about my weight or the way I eat?
- 170 4. Do I eat sensibly in front of others and then make up for it when I am alone?
- 171 5. Is my eating affecting my health or the way I live my life?
- 172 6. When my emotions are intense—whether positive or negative—do I find myself reaching for food?
- 173 7. Do my eating behaviors make me or others unhappy?
- 174 8. Have I ever used laxatives, vomiting, diuretics, excessive exercise, diet pills, shots, or other medical
175 interventions (including surgery) to try to control my weight?
- 176 9. Do I fast or severely restrict my food intake to control my weight?
- 177 10. Do I fantasize about how much better life would be if I were a different size or weight?
- 178 11. Do I need to chew or have something in my mouth all the time: food, gum, mints, candies, or beverages?
- 179 12. Have I ever eaten food that is burned, frozen, or spoiled; from containers in the grocery store; or out of
180 the garbage?
- 181 13. Are there certain foods I can’t stop eating after having the first bite?
- 182 14. Have I lost weight with a diet or “period of control” only to be followed by bouts of uncontrolled eating
183 and/or weight gain?
- 184 15. Do I spend too much time thinking about food, arguing with myself about whether or what to eat,
185 planning the next diet or exercise cure, or counting calories?
- 186

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

190
191 **Overeaters Anonymous:**
192 **How to find OA**
193 Visit the OA website at www.aa.org
194 or contact the World Service Office at 505-891-2664. Many local telephone directories also include listings
195 for Overeaters Anonymous.

196
197 **Overeaters Anonymous**© World Service Office 6075 Zenith Court NE
198 Rio Rancho, NM 87144 6424 USA
199 Mail Address: PO Box 44020 Rio Rancho, NM 87174 4020 USA
200 Tel: 1-505-891-2664 • Fax: 1-505-891-4320

201 info@oa.org • www.oa.org
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203 #130

204
205 **COMPULSIVE OVEREATING — AN INSIDE VIEW**
206 **The various manifestations of compulsive overeating**

207
208 **How Do OA Members Describe Life as Compulsive Eaters?**

209
210 **Introduction**

211
212 The following ~~passage describes how compulsive overeaters experience the various manifestations of~~
213 ~~compulsive eating. The passage was is excerpted taken~~ from the book *The Twelve Steps and Twelve*
214 *Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition* (pp. 9–12) and is offered here to ~~professionals,~~
215 ~~newcomers, and other interested persons~~ anyone who wants ~~desire~~ to know more about us and our behavior.

216
217 *An Inside View*

218
219 When we look with complete honesty at our lives, we see that where eating is concerned we
220 have acted in an extremely irrational and self-destructive manner. Under the compulsion to
221 overeat, many of us have done things no sane person would think of doing. We have driven
222 miles in the dead of night to satisfy a craving for food. We have eaten food that was frozen,
223 burnt, stale, or even dangerously spoiled. We have eaten food off other people’s plates, off the
224 floor, and off the ground. We have dug food out of the garbage and eaten it.

225
226 We have frequently lied about what we have eaten—lied to ourselves and to others because we
227 didn’t want to face the truth about what we do when it comes to food. We have stolen food from
228 our friends, families, and employers, as well as from the grocery store. We have also stolen
229 money to buy food. We have eaten beyond the point of being full, beyond the point of being
230 sick of eating. We have continued to overeat, knowing all the while we were disfiguring and
231 maiming our bodies. We have isolated ourselves to eat, damaging our relationships and
232 denying ourselves full social lives. Because of our compulsive eating, we have turned ourselves
233 into objects of ridicule and we have destroyed our health.

234
235 ~~Then, horrified by what we were doing to ourselves with food, we became obsessed with diets.~~
236 ~~...~~ We spent lots of money on weight-loss schemes; we bought all sorts of appetite
237 suppressants; we joined diet clubs and fitness centers; we had ourselves hypnotized and
238 analyzed; we had major surgery on our digestive systems; we had our ears stapled or our jaws
239 wired shut. All of this we did willingly, hoping we could still eat all we wanted and be free of
240 the compulsion.

241
242 Some of us went from doctor to doctor looking for a cure. The doctors gave us diets, but we
243 had no better success with those than with the other diets we’d been on. The doctors prescribed
244 shots and pills. Those worked for a while, but we inevitably lost control and overate again,
245 putting back on the weight we had worked so hard to lose and frequently gaining more.

246
247 Many of us tried fasting, with and without a doctor’s supervision. Usually we lost weight, but
248 as soon as we started eating again, the compulsive eating behavior returned, along with the
249 weight. Some of us learned to purge ourselves with vomiting, laxatives, or excessive exercise.
250 We damaged our digestive systems and our teeth while we starved our bodies of the nutrients
251 we needed to live. Some of us were so terrified of gaining weight, we went to great lengths to

252 restrict what we ate. We refused to eat certain foods, we developed complex rituals around
253 food, and we tried to avoid eating whenever possible. Other people told us we were too thin,
254 but we thought they were overreacting. Our weight went down, sometimes to dangerous levels,
255 but we still felt fat.

256
257 Most of us got plenty of advice from others about how to get to our “ideal” size, but nothing
258 permanently solved our problem. We found that no matter what we did to ease our turmoil, our
259 compulsive eating behavior eventually returned. Over time, we became weary and
260 discouraged from battling with weight, and our self-esteem went down.... ~~Still, we could never~~
261 ~~accept our powerlessness. The prospect of being obese, sick, and out of control for the rest of~~
262 ~~our lives led some of us to conclude that life was simply not worth living. Many of us thought~~
263 ~~about suicide. Some of us tried it.~~

264
265 ~~Most of us, however, never reached suicidal desperation. Instead we took comfort in a feeling~~
266 ~~that everything was all right as long as we got enough to eat. The only trouble was that, as our~~
267 ~~compulsive eating progressed, we ate more and more, yet we were never satisfied. Instead of~~
268 ~~bringing comfort, the overeating backfired. The more we ate, the more we suffered, yet we~~
269 ~~continued to overeat. Our true insanity could be seen in the fact that we kept right on trying to~~
270 ~~find comfort in excess food, long after it began to cause us misery.~~

271
272 Once we honestly looked at our lives, it became easy for us to admit we had acted insanely
273 where food and weight were concerned.... ~~Many of us, however, were able to confine our~~
274 ~~compulsive overeating to the hours when we were alone and to carry on with relatively normal~~
275 ~~lives. We worked hard during the day and ate hard at night. Surely we were sane in most~~
276 ~~respects.~~

277
278 More self-examination revealed many areas in which our lives were out of balance.... ~~We had~~
279 ~~to admit that we had not acted sanely when we responded to our children’s needs for attention~~
280 ~~by yelling at them, or when we were jealously possessive of our mates. Too much of the time~~
281 ~~we had lived in fear and anxiety. More comfortable with food than with people, we sometimes~~
282 ~~limited our social lives. We closed the curtains, stopped answering the phone, and hid in the~~
283 ~~house.~~

284
285 When we were around other people, we smiled and agreed when we really wanted to say no.
286 Some of us were unable to stand up for ourselves in abusive relationships; we felt we deserved
287 the abuse. Or, we focused on others’ faults and thought for hours about what they should do to
288 solve their problems, while our own problems went unsolved.

289
290 Compulsive eaters are often people of extremes. We overreacted to slight provocations while
291 ignoring the real issues in our lives. We were obsessively busy, then we were exhausted and
292 unable to act. We were wildly excited then deeply depressed. We saw the whole world in black
293 and white. If we couldn’t have it all, we didn’t want any; if we couldn’t be the best, we didn’t
294 want to participate.

295
296 Little by little, we saw how much pain our way of living was causing us. Gradually, we came
297 to believe we needed to change.

298 299 *There Is Help*

300
301 If you have ~~can~~ identified ~~with the~~ this ~~description in this pamphlet,~~ of the compulsive eater, we will
302 welcome you. ~~you may still have questions. After reading this pamphlet, you may still have questions. If~~

303 ~~se, w~~ We encourage you to attend an OA meeting, where members will be happy to welcome you and
304 give you further information and help. You can find meetings in your area—and also as well as online ~~or~~
305 and telephone meetings—by visiting our website at oa.org or by contacting the World Service Office at
306 1-505-891-2664. the address and/or phone number on the back of this pamphlet. If you know of someone
307 who might benefit from this program suggest that he or she contact Overeaters Anonymous.

308
309 Overeaters Anonymous@ World Service Office
310 6075 Zenith Court NE, Rio Rancho, NM 87144 6424 USA Mail Address: PO Box 44727, Rio Rancho, NM
311 87174 4727 USA
312 Tel: 1 505 891 2664 • Fax: 1 505 891 4320
313 info@oa.org • www.oa.org
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316
317 INTRODUCING
318 ~~OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS~~

319
320 **Further Questions and Answers People Often Ask about the OA Program of Recovery**

321
322 ~~About compulsive eating~~
323 ~~and the OA program~~
324 ~~of recovery~~

325
326 Since OA began in January 1960, many people—compulsive and normal eaters alike—have sought
327 answers to questions about Overeaters Anonymous and its program of recovery.

328
329 This section pamphlet provides answers to many of the specific questions that have been asked.

330
331 ~~After reading this pamphlet, you may still have questions. If so, we encourage you to attend an OA~~
332 ~~meeting, where members will be happy to welcome you and give you further information and help. You~~
333 ~~can find meetings in your area—and also online or telephone meetings—by visiting our Web site at~~
334 ~~www.oa.org or by contacting the World Service Office at the address and phone number on the back of~~
335 ~~this pamphlet.~~

336
337 **What is compulsive eating?**

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

341
342 In OA, we believe compulsive overeating is a disease with physical, emotional and spiritual components.
343 A disease causes some aspect of the body to malfunction. In our case, it’s the complex system that
344 governs food behavior. The body mechanisms that allow normal eaters to push the plate away, or
345 otherwise control their food behaviors, don’t function properly for us.

346
347 For some, the disease acts much like an alcohol or drug addiction; except in our case, certain foods or
348 overeating itself stimulate an insatiable craving for more. The OA definition of compulsive eating covers
349 all facets of unhealthy eating behaviors. It’s not only how much we eat or how much we weigh, but the
350 ways in which we try to control our food. Some of us hide our food and eat in secret. Some binge and purge,
351 while others alternate between overeating and starvation. All compulsive eaters have one thing in common:
352 no matter whether we’re struggling with overeating, undereating, bingeing, purging or starving ourselves,
353 we are driven by forces we don’t understand to deal with food in irrational and self-destructive ways. Once

354 compulsive eating as an illness has taken hold, an individual's willpower cannot stop it. The power of
355 choice over food is gone.

356
357 We in OA have discovered that this illness can be arrested—though never completely cured—if a person
358 is willing to follow the program that has proven successful for countless numbers of us. Whether OA will
359 work for a specific individual depends on his or her sincere desire to stop compulsive food behavior and a
360 willingness to take the actions suggested in the program. The OA recovery process is one of action.

361
362 **How can I tell if I am a compulsive overeater?**

363
364 Only you can decide.

365
366 Many of us have been told by family, friends, and even physicians that all we need is a little self control
367 and willpower to lose weight and eat normally. Believing this, we experienced frustrating periods of dieting
368 and losing weight, only to regain all the weight and more. We finally turned to OA because we felt our
369 eating habits had us beaten, and we were ready to try anything to be freed from our self-destructive eating
370 behaviors.

371
372 Others with little weight to lose, even those at normal weight or with only a few years of compulsive
373 eating behind them, have also turned to OA. We have discovered enough about compulsive eating to
374 recognize that it is a progressive illness.

375
376 In OA, compulsive overeaters are described as people whose eating habits have caused growing and
377 continuing problems in their lives. Only the individuals involved can say whether food has become an
378 unmanageable problem.

379
380 **Questions about Weight and Dieting**

381
382 **Must I be a certain amount over my normal weight to come to OA? Is there a weight requirement to**
383 **come to OA?**

384
385 No. OA works for almost anyone who wants to stop eating compulsively, no matter what size the
386 individual may be. Some people who come into OA have already attained a healthy body weight; others
387 may be underweight. There are as many degrees of weight as there are many types of OA members,
388 ranging from underweight or normal weight to those who have hundreds of pounds or kilos to lose. ~~We~~
389 ~~turn to OA to find a way of life where we can live comfortably without returning to compulsive eating~~
390 ~~habits.~~

391
392 There are as many degrees of weight as there are OA members, ranging from underweight or normal
393 weight to those who have hundreds of pounds/kilos to lose. Whatever our weight, all who have a desire
394 to stop eating compulsively have equal advantages in coming to Overeaters Anonymous. Our common
395 bond is stated in Step One: "We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become
396 unmanageable." We turn to OA to find a way of life where we can live comfortably without returning
397 to compulsive eating habits.

398
399
400 **I've failed at every diet. How can OA prevent these "slips"?**

401
402 No one fails in OA. As long as a person is willing to work the OA program, recovery is possible.

403

404 “Slips” into compulsive ~~overeating~~ do not need to happen in OA, but some of us experience them.
405 Although slips may sometimes be brief, they can also lead to eating binges and weight gain. Whenever
406 a slip occurs, members are encouraged to reach for all the help available to them through OA.
407

408 We who have been through these periods can often trace a slip to specific causes. We may have forgotten
409 we were compulsive ~~overeaters~~ and became overconfident. Or we may have let ourselves become too
410 preoccupied with business or ~~social~~ personal affairs to remember the importance of abstaining from
411 compulsive ~~overeating~~. Or we may have let ourselves become tired, letting down our mental and
412 emotional defenses. Whatever the cause of a slip, the solution ~~was~~ can be found through practicing the
413 Twelve Step recovery program of Overeaters Anonymous.
414

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

416
417 For those who seek help with a diet, OA recommends consulting a qualified professional. The OA program
418 enables compulsive eaters to abstain from excess food as well as the specific foods that lead to compulsive
419 eating, one day at a time. Overeaters Anonymous, therefore, supports any member who wants to follow a
420 professional’s nutritional advice.
421

422 OA is not a diet club. We recover by practicing the OA Twelve Step program for physical, emotional, and
423 spiritual recovery. We find, among other things, freedom from food obsession, power to act rationally in
424 difficult situations, and a better way to live.
425

426 ~~For more information on plans of eating and examples of plans some members have found successful, see~~
427 ~~the pamphlets *A Plan of Eating* and *Dignity of Choice*.~~
428

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

430
431 Yes. All who struggle with compulsive food behaviors are welcomed in love and fellowship. Overeaters
432 Anonymous supports each person’s efforts to recover and accepts any member who desires to stop eating
433 compulsively. When individuals ask about medical matters, OA always recommends they seek professional
434 advice.
435

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

437
438 OA recommends that persons who need help with a specific medical condition, such as a thyroid
439 disorder or water retention, consult a qualified physician. OA does not give medical advice.
440

441 We who have suffered with similar medical problems find that the OA program enables us to follow a
442 doctor’s recommendations with less difficulty.
443

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

445
446 Overeaters Anonymous does not advise on any medical matters. Those of us in recovery have found we
447 develop strong inner resources by working the Twelve Steps. By relying ~~upon~~ a Power greater than
448 ourselves, we find continued success in abstaining from compulsive ~~overeating~~.
449

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

451
452 Overeaters Anonymous welcomes anyone with a desire to stop eating compulsively, including those who
453 have had bariatric surgery or are contemplating it.
454

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

456

457 **Can't a compulsive overeater just use willpower to stop excessive eating?**

458

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

465

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

472

473 **What is meant by "a Power greater than ourselves"?**

474

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

479

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

487

488 **Is OA a religious society?**

489

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

493

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

496

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

501

502 *Questions about How to Work OA's Program of Recovery*

503

504 **What is a sponsor?**

505

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

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

514

515 **What does abstinence mean? Recovery?**

516

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

518 1. Abstinence: The act of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while
519 working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight.

520 2. Recovery: Removal of the need to engage in compulsive eating behaviors.

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

523

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

525

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

531

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

536

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

540

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

542

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

546

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

551

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

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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?

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

609

610 **How much does OA membership cost?**

611

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

617

618 **How does OA support itself?**

619

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

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632 been restored, our continued attendance at meetings is not only a way to maintain our sanity, but also a way
633 to do service in support of new members, helping others find relief from compulsive eating.

634

635 Questions about OA as an Organization

636

637 ~~What is the OA World Service Office (WSO)?~~

638

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

641

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

647

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

650

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

652

653 **Who runs OA?**

654

655 Volunteers! OA is truly unusual in that it has no central government and a minimum of formal organization.
656 It has no officers or executives who wield power or authority over the Fellowship or individual members.

657
658 In even the most informal organization, however, certain jobs obviously need to be done. For example, in
659 local groups someone has to arrange for the meeting place, account for group finances, make sure adequate
660 OA literature is available, and keep in touch with local, regional, and international service centers. On the
661 international level, people must be responsible for the maintenance and smooth functioning of the World
662 Service Office.

663
664 All of this means that OA at the local, regional, and international levels needs responsible people to perform
665 certain duties. It is important to understand that these members perform services only. They make no
666 individual decisions and issue no individual judgments affecting other groups or OA as a whole. Persons
667 who accept these responsibilities are directly accountable to those they serve, and service jobs periodically
668 rotate among members.

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691 own expenses and send the balance to their intergroup or service board, their regional office, and the World
692 Service Office. The financing of all OA service bodies depends on these regular contributions from
693 meetings.

694
695 *Questions about the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of OA*

696
697 **What is the Twelve Step recovery program?**

698
699 The Twelve Steps are the heart of the OA recovery program. The Twelve Steps offer a new way of life that
700 enables ~~the compulsive overeaters~~ to live without the need for excess food and foods that cause us to eat
701 compulsively. ~~The Steps are suggestions only, based on the experience of recovering OA members.~~
702 Members who make an earnest effort to follow these Steps and apply them in daily living get far more out
703 of OA than do those members who merely come to meetings and don't do the serious emotional and spiritual
704 work involved in the Steps. The Twelve Steps are listed in an earlier section of this pamphlet titled **What**
705 **Is the Overeaters Anonymous Program of Recovery?**

706

707 The ideas expressed in the Twelve Steps, which originated in Alcoholics Anonymous, reflect practical
708 experience and application of physical, emotional and spiritual insights as recorded by thinkers throughout
709 many ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work! They enable compulsive eaters to lead
710 happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which OA has been built.

711
712 Here are the Twelve Steps, which are suggested as a program of recovery for compulsive overeaters:
713

714 **The Twelve Steps-**

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

729
730 *Permission to use the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services,*
731 *Inc.*

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

734
735 The word sanity derives from the Latin word “sanus,” meaning “sound, healthy.” The word sanity as used
736 in OA means “sound or rational thinking and acting.”

737
738 Most of us admit to irrational behavior, including our attempts to control food and other areas of our lives.
739 A person with sound thinking would not repeatedly engage in self-destructive behaviors. A person with
740 sound thinking would not repeatedly take actions that had not worked previously and expect different
741 results. The words “restore us to sanity” in Step Two does not imply that compulsive eaters are mentally
742 deranged, but that where our actions and feelings toward food and other areas of our lives are concerned,
743 sanity cannot be claimed. By turning to OA and expressing a desire to return to rational behavior, we are
744 taking a step toward achieving sanity.

746 **What are the Twelve Traditions?**

747
748 The Twelve Traditions are to ~~the~~ OA groups what the Twelve Steps are to the individual. The Twelve
749 Traditions are ~~a~~ one of the means by which OA remains unified in a common cause. They are suggested
750 principles to ensure the smooth functioning, survival, and growth of the many groups ~~which~~ that comprise
751 Overeaters Anonymous.

752
753 Like the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions have their origins in Alcoholics Anonymous. These
754 Traditions describe attitudes ~~which~~ that those early AA members believed were important to group survival
755 and ~~which~~ that have proven to be effective.

756

757 OA members ensure group unity—which is so essential to individual recovery—by practicing the attitudes
758 suggested by the following Twelve Traditions:

759
760 **The Twelve Traditions**

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

782
783 *Permission to use the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World*
784 *Services, Inc.*

785
786 **Why does OA place such emphasis upon “anonymity”?**

787
788 Anonymity at the most basic level says we don’t disclose the identities of individual members, their
789 personal situations, or what they share in confidence at meetings, online, or on the phone with us. This
790 makes OA a safe place where we can be honest with ourselves and others. It allows us to express ourselves
791 freely at meetings and in conversation, and it safeguards us from gossip. Of course, we as individuals have
792 the right to make our own membership known and, in fact, must do this if we are to carry the message to
793 other compulsive eaters (~~part of~~ Step Twelve). We don’t use anonymity to limit our effectiveness within
794 the Fellowship. For example, it’s fine to use our full names within our group or OA service body. The
795 concept of anonymity helps us focus on principles rather than personalities.

796
797 Anonymity is also vital at the public level of press, radio, films, television, and other public media of
798 communication. By keeping our members anonymous at the media public level, we help ensure that egotism
799 and self-glorification ~~will~~ do not adversely affect the OA Fellowship.

800
801 Humility is fundamental to anonymity. In practicing these principles and in giving up personal distinction
802 for the common good, OA members ensure that the unity of Overeaters Anonymous will continue.
803 According to the First Tradition, “personal recovery depends upon OA unity” . . . and anonymity is essential
804 to the preservation of that unity.

805
806 **~~WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION? OTHER OA PUBLICATIONS~~**

807

808 **PAMPHLETS**

809

810 *A Plan of Eating*

811 *A Program of Recovery*

812 *About OA*

813 *A Commitment to Abstinence*

814 *Before You Take That First Compulsive Bite, Remember ...*

815 *Dignity of Choice*

816 *Is Food a Problem for You?*

817 *To the Family of the Compulsive Overeater*

818 *To the Man Who Wants to Stop Compulsive Overeating, Welcome*

819 *To the Newcomer*

820 *To the Teen*

821

822 **BOOKS**

823

824 *Abstinence*

825 *A New Beginning*

826 *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*

827 *For Today*

828 *Lifeline Sampler*

829 *Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition*

830 *Seeking the Spiritual Path*

831 *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*

832 *Voices of Recovery*

833

834 **PERIODICALS**

835

836 *A Step Ahead* newsletter for members and groups

837 *Lifeline*, OA's international magazine of recovery

838 *The Courier* newsletter for professionals

839

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

844

845 **How to find OA**

846 Visit the OA Web—site website at www.oa.org,

847 or contact the World Service Office at 1-505-891-2664.

848 Many local telephone directories also include local listings

849 for Overeaters Anonymous.

850

851 **Overeaters Anonymous®**

852 World Service Office

853 6075 Zenith Court NE

854 Rio Rancho, NM 87144-6424 USA

855 Mail Address: PO Box 44020

856 Rio Rancho, NM 87174-4020 USA

857 Tel: 1-505-891-2664 • Fax: 1-505-891-4320

858 Email: info@oa.org
859 www.oa.org
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863
864 *[if approved, Conference Seal of Approval goes here.]*
865

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