A COMMITMENT TO ABSTINENCE
A LIFETIME OF ABSTINENCE

A decision, one day at a time
One Day at a Time

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.

A COMMITMENT TO ABSTINENCE

Introduction to Abstinence and Recovery

It is the great paradox of the Twelve Step program of Overeaters Anonymous that we make a commitment to sane eating for only twenty-four hours in order to achieve a lifetime of recovery from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors. One of the program’s sayings is “I can do for one day what I could never do for a lifetime.” And yet, our intention, and our reality, is to have many days, months, and years of continuous abstinence. How do we go about this?

It may be daunting at first if we think about never being able to eat a certain food again. Yet there are thousands of recovering compulsive eaters who do just that, happily. This pamphlet is designed to assist us in making a commitment to be abstinent just for today; to keep that commitment no matter what; and to live our lives at a healthy body weight without food controlling us. This is the achievable goal. It takes action, perseverance, and faith. The result is recovery.

Recovery and a commitment to abstinence

RECOVERY IS THE RESULT of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program. Many of us have come to believe that committing ourselves to abstinence on a daily basis is essential to our recovery.

What is recovery in Overeaters Anonymous?
Recovery in OA is defined as the “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."

Most of us have come to believe that committing ourselves to abstinence on a daily basis is essential for recovery.

**What is abstinence?**

According to the dictionary, the word “abstain” means to refrain from. In Overeaters Anonymous, "abstinence is the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. Spiritual, emotional and physical recovery is the result of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program."*

**What is a commitment to abstinence?**

“Commitment” means to entrust, to put into safekeeping, to pledge oneself to a particular course. Hasn’t this been our greatest problem: truly committing ourselves to refraining from compulsive eating on an ongoing basis? Full of determination, we are great in the short run, but when the "everydayness" boredom from the daily routine begins to set in, we lose interest.

For most people, especially compulsive overeaters, a diet is something temporary—one goes on it and then goes off it. In Overeaters Anonymous we believe in abstaining from compulsive eating every day, one day at a time. Each individual is free to determine his or her own way of achieving abstinence according to personal needs and preferences. Abstaining from compulsive eating, unlike dieting, has a sense of permanence about it. However, unlike our dieting days, we abstain only one day at a time, not worrying about any ensuing results. Each new day, we recommit to our personal plan of abstinence, without thinking about tomorrow, next month, or next year. The next day, we make the same twenty-four-hour commitment. In this manner, we can abstain for a lifetime.

**MAKING OUR COMMITMENT TO ABSTINENCE**

*Getting Started*

Here are various actions OA members have taken to help promote their abstinence:

- **Work with a sponsor.** Find a sponsor who will help you with the program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Many OA members find it helpful to commit their plan of eating to a sponsor each day. You will want to develop your own commitment to abstinence by discussing the suggestions in this section with your sponsor.

- **Develop a plan of eating.** A plan of eating is a guide to the food you choose to eat each day. (See *Dignity of Choice*† for some sample plans of eating.) A food plan can be as simple as an outline that promotes sane eating, or it can include planning, weighing, and measuring all portions. Before choosing a specific food plan, we encourage you to consult a qualified health professional who has some knowledge of this disease, especially if you have a medical condition.

- **Plan your meals in advance.** Whether you weigh and measure your food or trust your judgment regarding portions, your day may be simplified by planning, buying, preparing, and committing your food to your sponsor in advance. This can free you from on-the-spot decision making. Don’t be caught unprepared! Have a plan when attending events where


† Refer to the OA pamphlet *Dignity of Choice*, available at bookstore.oa.org.
food will be provided for you. This may include inquiring about the menu or even choosing
to bring your own food.

- **Use the Tools.** In addition to a plan of eating and sponsorship, OA has seven other Tools
  of Recovery; use one or more of them instead of eating compulsively. Expressing your
  feelings by putting them in writing or by reaching out to someone by phone or text
  telephoning someone often relieves the desire to numb such feelings with food. Reading
  OA literature or attending an OA meeting helps strengthen your commitment to abstain
  until the obsession/compulsion passes. Doing service or reaching out to others is a
  guaranteed proven way to refocus your thoughts.

- **Remember HALT.** Don’t allow yourself to get too **hungry**, too **angry**, too **lonely**, or too
  **tired**. Particularly avoid skipping meals, which may tempt you to overeat later, justifying
  it as “making up” for that missed meal. Avoid skipping a meal or eating a meal too soon
  after the previous one. These actions may tempt you to justify overeating later.

- **Enjoy your meals.** Abstinence releases the pain and guilt accumulated over the many
  years of destructive eating behaviors. Relax. Slow down. Take the time to enjoy your meals. You
  deserve it.

- **Be conscious of the amount of food you eat.** Many OA members don’t take second
  helpings at meals, since overeating often begins with “just a little bit more.”

- **Follow a predetermined schedule for weighing yourself, self-weighing plan.** Many OA
  members have found that weighing monthly is advisable. Frequent weighing or refusing to
  weigh can put too much emphasis on physical recovery alone.

- **Entrust yourself and your abstinence to a Power greater than yourself as you continue
to do the work each day to bring about recovery.**

Don’t let any uncomfortable feelings or negative impressions you may have about making a
commitment scare you away. Most of us felt the same way in the beginning. And yet, we soon
found that practicing the OA Twelve Step program of recovery was doing for us what we had never
been able to do for ourselves. In time, we learned a whole new way of living, and you can, too.

**STRENGTHENING OUR COMMITMENT TO ABSTINENCE:**

**Developing Your Program**

As time passes, and the number of days we refrain from compulsive eating add up, it becomes
necessary to further strengthen our commitment to abstinence. To facilitate this, we offer these
suggestions:

- Work with a sponsor who is able to guide you through the Twelve Steps. It is acceptable
to work with more than one sponsor at a time.

- Create daily gratitude lists. Thank your Higher Power that you have found OA and no
  longer need to use food to solve your problems. A growing sense of appreciation and
  gratitude for even the smallest aspects of life can create acceptance and peace.

- Develop a list of people you can call or text who will support you in your recovery. This is
  especially helpful when your program is being challenged by food or life’s problems.

- Remember, while many come to OA for the vanity, most stay for the sanity that living in
  recovery brings.

- Volunteer to do service at your meeting(s). It makes you a contributing member of the
  Fellowship and helps create a sense of belonging.

---

† Refer to the OA pamphlet *The Tools of Recovery*, available at bookstore.oa.org.
• Attend OA recovery events, such as workshops, retreats, and conventions. There is nothing more exhilarating than to see and hear recovery in action, and to know so many others are abstaining one day at a time.

• If you are having frequent food thoughts or cravings:
  o Examine whether you are eating something that contains a substance that you ordinarily avoid. Perhaps you have discovered a new “trigger food,” one that you would be wise to stay away from. Your cravings may also stem from some inner turmoil over a situation you have not addressed. Regardless of the possible causes, discuss what is happening with your sponsor.
  o Avoid dwelling on pleasant memories associated with certain foods or thoughts about how good a particular food might taste. You are kidding yourself if you think “just one bite” will “bring back the good old days” or make some bad situation better or easier to live with.
  o When obsessive thoughts arise, remember that you always have a choice between the peace and sanity gained from refraining from that food you’re obsessing about and the pain created by over- or under-eating. The pleasure is, at best, fleeting, the despair unending.

• Remember that each time you face a situation without eating compulsively it will be easier for you to abstain the next time. Making abstinence a priority strengthens your commitment.

• Avoid lamenting that you may never be able to eat like a normal person. Recognize that you have an illness, one that can never be cured. However, by working the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of the OA program, you can develop a way of thinking and living that allows you a daily reprieve from your disease.

Many OA members consciously cultivate their enjoyment of abstinence from compulsive eating. As a result of abstinence, we have found freedom from guilt, remorse, and self-condemnation about the food we eat. We have freedom from the power food once had over us, and we have the ability to make healthy food choices. We have the gift to eat and sleep normally, and wake up glad we are abstinent.

How do we help ourselves keep this commitment?

We strive to:
• Entrust ourselves and our abstinence to a power greater than ourselves every day. All we need to do is to make the commitment.
• Cultivate continued acceptance of the fact that our choice is between uncontrollable compulsive eating and doing without that first compulsive bite.
• Cultivate humble gratitude for having discovered that we were compulsive eaters, and that we found OA when we did.
• Accept as natural that for a period of time—and it can be a long one—we may repeatedly experience:
  o the conscious nagging and craving for excess and/or inappropriate food;
  o the sudden, overwhelming impulse to eat compulsively or to take that first compulsive bite;
  o the gnawing desire for the soothing comfort that just a bite or two of food once gave us.
• Avoid cultivating or dwelling on thoughts about any real or imagined pleasure once derived from certain foods, and avoid talking about them.
• Stop kidding ourselves that a bite or two would make some bad situation better or easier to live with. By working the Twelve Steps, we develop a way of thinking and acting which
enables us to live each day without eating compulsively regardless of what may upset us, or how hard the urge for a little taste may hit us.

- Remember that each time we face a situation without eating compulsively it will make it easier for us to abstain the next time. Making abstinence a priority strengthens our commitment. Many times we’re afraid we won’t make it. Although the drive to overeat is powerful, it cannot really hurt us as long as we don’t act on it. Our experience shows us that even the strongest urge will pass.

- Cultivate enjoyment of abstinence from compulsive eating; because, as a result, we have found:
  - freedom from guilt, remorse and self-condemnation about the food we eat;
  - freedom from the power food once had over us, and the ability to make choices about what we eat;
  - the gift to eat and sleep normally and wake up glad we are abstinent.

Some actions that help promote personal abstinence

Here are various actions OA members have used to help promote their abstinence. You are encouraged to take what you like and leave the rest. The following suggestions are not rules. As you develop your own abstinence, you may want to discuss these various approaches with your sponsor.

- Develop a plan of eating. A plan of eating includes a guide to the food we choose to eat each day. Some members find that following a plan of eating simplifies their daily lives and frees them from on-the-spot decision making. For some an effective plan includes specific foods and portions and the elimination of known binge foods or foods compulsively craved. For others, a plan of eating is simply an overall guide that allows flexibility and promotes sane eating. A plan can be as simple as a set number of moderate meals a day or it can include weighing and measuring all portions. Before choosing a specific plan, we suggest and encourage you to consult a qualified professional.

- Plan your meals in advance. Whether you weigh and measure your food or trust your judgment regarding portions, your day may be simplified by planning or even preparing your meals in advance. This can free you from facing food choices throughout the day.

- Work with a sponsor. Find a sponsor who will help you with the program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. Many OA members find it helpful to commit their plan of eating to a sponsor each day.

- Use the tools. In addition to a plan of eating and sponsorship, OA has seven other tools of recovery; try to use one or more of them before you start eating compulsively. Expressing your feelings by putting them in writing or by telephoning someone often relieves the desire to obliterate such feelings with food. Reading OA literature or attending an OA meeting helps strengthen you until the compulsion passes. Doing service or reaching out to others is a guaranteed way to refocus your thoughts.

- Remember HALT. It is suggested that you not get too hungry, too angry, too lonely, or too tired. Particularly avoid skipping meals, which may tempt you to overeat later, justifying it as “making up for” that missed meal.

- Enjoy your meals. Abstinence releases the pain and guilt accumulated over the many years of overeating. Relax. Take the time to enjoy your meals. You deserve it.

- Be conscious of the amount of food you eat. Some OA members don’t take second
helpings at meals, since overeating often begins with "just a little bit more."

• **Follow a predetermined weighing plan.** Many OA members have found that weighing
  monthly is advisable. Frequent weighing or refusal to weigh can put too much emphasis
  on physical recovery alone.

**Does keeping a commitment to abstinence seem too much for you?**

Please don’t let any uncomfortable feelings or negative impressions you may have scare you away. Most of us felt the same way in the beginning. And yet, we soon found that practicing the OA Twelve-Step program of recovery was doing for us what we had never been able to do for ourselves. In time, we learned a whole new way of living.

One day at a time, it works for us, and it can work for you. This we promise.

**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 nonprofessional, 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.

**How to find OA**

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

**Overeaters Anonymous**

World Service Office
6075 Zenith Court NE
Rio Rancho, NM 87144-6426 USA
Mail Address: PO Box 44727
Rio Rancho, NM 87174-4727 USA
Tel: 1-505-891-2664 * Fax: 1-505-891-4320
Email: info@oa.org
KEEPING OUR COMMITMENT TO ABSTINENCE:

No Matter What

While our commitment to abstinence from compulsive eating is vital to our lives, we shouldn’t be surprised or discouraged if we have an occasional, sudden desire to eat outside of our food plan. As disturbing as these cravings and thoughts may be, it is important to remember that we do not need to act on them! Regardless of how intense the desire to eat or restrict may be, you can take specific actions:

- Call or text your sponsor or an OA friend. Commit to not breaking your abstinence. Talk about anything that is bothering you at the moment. Ask for help! There are many members in program who want to help you stay abstinent.
- Go to a meeting! There are many face-to-face, telephone, and virtual meetings. Attend one instead of picking up the food. To find a meeting, go to oa.org and click Find a meeting.
- Write about it. Carry a small journal with you for this purpose.
- Write a gratitude list. Thank your Higher Power for your abstinence.
- Reach out to help another compulsive eater. And remember, the first and best way you can help others is to be abstinent yourself.
- Pray to your Higher Power for help to get through the desire without eating or restricting. The obsession will pass if you do not pick up the food. If you do pick up the food, the craving will continue or worsen.
- Look beyond the imagined pleasure of that first bite to the inevitable feelings of physical discomfort, remorse, and hopelessness. Many OA members refer to this as “thinking the bite through.”
- Ask yourself, “How much of this food would it take to satisfy me? Do I really want to do that?” Recognize that “just one bite” is a lie.
- Remember that each time you face a situation without restricting, purging, or compulsively overeating you strengthen your spiritual connection to your Higher Power, making the next challenge easier.
- Don’t believe the lie that food will make a bad situation better or easier to live with. Compulsively over- or under-eating your way through a bad situation only creates more problems; remaining abstinent helps you think clearly and remain “in the solution.”
- Focus your thoughts on these benefits of abstinence:
  - Abstinence leads to being happy, joyous, and free; taking that first compulsive bite or engaging in compulsive food behaviors brings back shame and remorse.
  - Abstinence leads to self-respect and peace of mind; taking that first compulsive bite or engaging in compulsive food behaviors activates the disease, leading to cravings and food obsession.
  - Abstinence can help reverse the devastating effects of this disease and restore balance to mind, body, and spirit.
  - Abstinence gives us the ability to face life’s challenges with peace of mind, self-respect, and an open heart.
Remind yourself that when your heart is heavy, or your mind is troubled and confused, your resistance is low. In the Fellowship of Overeaters Anonymous, you are among people who truly understand you. You are no longer alone!

**Before You Take That First Compulsive Bite, Remember…**

*You have a friend in Overeaters Anonymous*

Our commitment to abstinence from compulsive eating is the most important thing in our lives without exception! When we eat more (or less) food than we need, we are quickly reminded that compulsive eating impairs our health, dulls our faculties, and disrupts any chance we have for peace of mind. Abstinence brings clarity and can help us more quickly understand the underlying causes of our destructive relationship with food. Cultivate continued acceptance of the fact that your choice is between unhappy eating binges and doing without just one small compulsive bite.

When confronted with the urge to eat compulsively, we find it helpful to consider the following points before taking that first compulsive bite:

1. Look beyond the initial pleasure of eating to the inevitable feelings of physical discomfort, self-recrimination and hopelessness. Many OA members refer to this practice as “thinking the bite through.”
2. Be grateful that you have found OA and no longer need to use food to solve your problems.
3. Don’t be surprised by a desire to eat compulsively. Even after being abstinent for a period of time, you may find that your overactive imagination tempts you with sudden impulses to restrict or eat compulsively, feeling you will be free from the inevitable destructive consequences.
   As disturbing as these cravings and feelings are, you do not have to act on them.
4. Always remember: each time you face a situation without restricting, purging, or compulsively overeating, you strengthen your spiritual connection to your Higher Power, making the next challenge easier.
5. Regardless of how upset you are, or how intense the desire to eat may be, you can take specific actions to offset an inappropriate desire for food, such as praying, calling an OA friend, or writing about it.
6. Avoid self-pity! You may never be able to eat like a “normal” person. However, by following the OA program you can learn a way of living that addresses your shortcomings and helps you become the person you were meant to be.
7. Don’t dwell on any real or imagined pleasure you once got from certain foods. “Change the channel!”
8. Don’t believe the lie that food will make a bad situation better or easier to live with. Compulsively over- or undereating your way through a bad situation only creates more problems; remaining abstinent helps you think clearly and remain “in the solution.”
9. Remember all the people you’ve met in program who are helping you stay abstinent.
10. Seek out ways to help other compulsive eaters. Remember, the first and best way you can help others is to be abstinent yourself. “Those of us who live this program don’t simply carry the message; we are the message” (*The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*, p. 106).
11. Remember that:
   each abstinent day brings with it honesty, integrity, and accountability;
   each abstinent day is a gift worth going to any length to experience; and
   a decision to be abstinent today will enable you to overcome fears of not getting enough food, attention, or love.
12. Cultivate a helpful association of ideas:
Abstinence leads to being happy, joyous, and free; taking that first compulsive bite brings back shame and remorse.

Abstinence leads to self-respect and peace of mind; taking that first compulsive bite activates the disease, leading to cravings and food obsession.

13. Cultivate gratitude that:
refraining from one small bite can dramatically change your outlook on life;
you are no longer alone—you have found OA and a Fellowship of people who truly understand and want to help you;
you have an illness, not a moral shortcoming, and your disease can be arrested one day at a time, simply by not taking that first compulsive bite;
abstaining from compulsive overeating can help reverse the devastating effects of this disease on mind, body, and spirit; and
you no longer need to use food for comfort; in time, you will learn to accept life on life’s terms without the need to chase food for pleasure.

14. Think again and again about the joyful aspects of abstinence, such as:
the return of balance to mind and body;
the growing sense of appreciation and gratitude for even the smallest aspects of a new life; and
the ability to face life’s challenges with peace of mind, self-respect, and an open heart.

15. Remind yourself that when your heart is heavy, your resistance is low, or your mind is troubled and confused, you will find comfort in the Fellowship of Overeaters Anonymous.

In OA, you are among people who truly understand you—a part of something special. Welcome to Overeaters Anonymous. Welcome home.

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.

How to find OA
Visit the OA Website at www.or.org
Or contact the World Service Office at 505-891-2664
Many local telephone directories also include listings for Overeaters Anonymous
MAINTAINING OUR COMMITMENT TO ABSTINENCE:

A lifetime commitment one day at a time

Living with a healthy body weight

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.

The OA definition of abstinence speaks of “working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight.” But how do we determine what that weight is for us? Many factors must be considered: body type, gender, height, age, physical limitations, medications, and more. Since we have likely been obsessed with reaching “goal weight” for years, it is not advisable for us to make a determination of a healthy weight by ourselves. It is suggested that we work with one or more health care professionals and our sponsor to determine a range for our healthy weight.

The day When we initially reach a reasonable, healthy body weight, is a day we may be filled with conflicting emotions: joy, fear, anxiety, perhaps even anger. We ask ourselves, “Now what?” We may have attained a healthy body weight before, only to return to where we were, or even worse. The difference between past attempts at weight control and our recovery program within the Fellowship of Overeaters Anonymous is the incorporation of the OA’s Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and OA’s nine program Tools into our lives. The path outlined for us in the Steps and Traditions assures that we will be free from the disease of compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors and that we will experience the miracles of physical recovery and continued abstinence.
In the early stage of maintenance, some of us may have to face the frightening prospect of adjusting our food plan to stop losing or gaining weight. We may experience emotional pain that we previously masked with food, or a preoccupation with our weight. Relationships may suddenly be frightening. We may feel vulnerable in our new body shape. Sexuality may become an issue. It may be difficult to pick out new clothes, look at ourselves in the mirror, or walk into a roomful of people. We can no longer attribute our feelings of guilt, remorse, and self-hate to our compulsive eating and food behaviors or to being or feeling fat. As a result, anxiety, insecurity, and resentment may take their toll. It is important to address these feelings through the Twelve Steps so that we don't return to old, unhealthy behaviors in order to avoid them. Remember, our personal Higher Power, our OA sponsor, and other members of the Fellowship are available to help us through the hard times.

While working toward a healthy body weight, many of us were so focused on following our plan of eating and physical recovery that we did not devote enough time to the emotional and spiritual aspects of our program. We and failed to delve into the issues that caused us to eat compulsively. Now, even though we've achieved a healthy body weight, our thoughts and feelings often remain unchanged. Others of us may have experienced some emotional and spiritual recovery before we were able to achieve physical recovery. Regardless of our personal path, it is important to acknowledge that reaching a healthy body weight is only one factor in recovery.

Society, however, since society places such a great importance on appearance, if it looks good, it is good once we have reached a healthy body weight, our family and friends may think that all our problems are solved. They are probably unaware that, perhaps for the first time in our lives, we are confronted with the real problems of the disease of underlying problems that led to our compulsive overeating or compulsive food behaviors. We may be experiencing emotional pain, which we had previously masked with food, or a preoccupation with our weight. Relationships may suddenly be frightening. Sexuality no longer feels safely hidden. Meeting new people can bring on a feeling of terror. It may be difficult to pick out new clothes, look at ourselves in the mirror, or walk into a roomful of people.

In order to protect our life of abstinence, we should be aware of the continued challenges we may face. For example, as years pass, many of us may miss the compliments that weight loss (or weight gain) brought us. Others may find that, as we age, the plan of eating that once worked successfully now results in weight gain. In some cases, this may be further impacted by physical ailments that require new medications or preclude us from doing our normal exercise routines.

Or, we may become complacent about what supported our recovery in the first place. After many months or years since we came to OA in desperation, we who are living with a healthy body weight may have forgotten the pain of active compulsive eating. If we do not want to return to that state, it is imperative we remain committed to our abstinence and our program.

How do we deal with all of this and the accompanying thoughts and feelings and still stay abstinent? In addition to practicing the actions listed in the previous sections, we offer these additional suggestions for maintaining abstinence and a healthy body weight:

We can no longer attribute our feelings of guilt, remorse, and self-hate to our compulsive eating and food behaviors, or to being or feeling fat. As a result, anxiety, insecurity, and resentment may take their toll. For those of us who must change our plan of eating at this stage to prevent further weight loss or gain, a different way of eating may be a terrifying idea. Remember, our personal
Higher Power, our OA sponsor, and other members of the Fellowship are available to help us through the hard times.

In OA, we don’t just stop eating compulsively or engaging in compulsive food behaviors; we did that plenty of times on diets. OA gives us a spiritually based program for living one day at a time. We are given a daily reprieve from our disease that is contingent on remaining “in fit spiritual condition” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 85). We know serenity and peace of mind. We know that we can be uniquely useful to another compulsive overeater by sharing our experience, strength, and hope. Today we live life with all its feelings, and we have faith that if we work the program, it will continue to work for us.

Since the day we walked into our first OA meeting, we’ve learned and experienced much. Using our Higher Power and the OA program, we are ready to continue this wonderful new adventure of living life to the fullest, one day at a time.

* Refer to the OA pamphlet The Tools of Recovery (#160P).

** STATEMENT ON ABSTINENCE AND RECOVERY: “Abstinence in Overeaters Anonymous is the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. Spiritual, emotional, and physical recovery is the result of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program.”

Remember, our personal Higher Power, our OA sponsor, and other members of the Fellowship are available to help us through the hard times.

Personal Stories of Maintenance

He Asked for Direction

— The journey that led me here began in high school when I was a miserable, obese teenage boy. I cried for help, and my mother took me to a diet doctor, which began fourteen years of dieting and a fluctuating weight of 30 to 95 pounds (14 to 43 kg) over my current weight. Eventually, I wasn’t able to diet anymore and became frightened. The things I was doing with food were unhealthy and sick, and becoming progressively worse.

— I had a strong diet mentality when I entered our Fellowship but quickly realized that OA was different than anything I had ever tried before. The first night, I selected a food plan from the Dignity of Choice pamphlet and got a sponsor.

— With my sponsor’s guidance, I crafted my action plan to help me achieve abstinence. I used my plan of eating as one of the Tools to help me achieve abstinence. In addition to being addicted to refined sugar, I identified my compulsive food behavior as a volume eater without any defined mealtimes; in other words, I ate a lot all the time. For the first time, I began weighing and measuring my food, and I continue to do so daily. My surplus weight was removed in a few months, and for the first time, I was at a normal body weight. In the past, I’d always thought of the end of the diet as reaching goal weight because diet clubs I belonged to referred to it that way. I now began to think of “maintenance,” that word that was spoken in the OA rooms. I had finally reached the mountaintop—so now what?

— During my dieting years, I had blamed my obesity on everything and truly thought that, once I was thin, all those problems would lessen and eventually disappear. That sure didn’t happen, but reaching a normal body weight was the beginning of my life of looking inward and trying to live the Twelve Steps as written, one day at a time.
After ten years of staying within my chosen weight range, I gained 5 pounds (2 kg). I was not sure why—maybe a change in activity or the aging process. Someone, not my sponsor, suggested I just allow for this change and raise my goal weight range by 5 pounds (2 kg). I know me, though, and could see myself doing that every year. I also knew that, for me, this would be giving in to the power of the food. For someone who is powerless over food, this is not a wise choice. Working with my sponsor, I reduced amounts, and I weighed myself a little more often. Over the past twenty-five years, my weight has fluctuated, sometimes over range and sometimes under range. I turn this over to my Higher Power and my sponsor and just listen and adjust with their guidance.

—God-given abstinence is the most important thing in my life, and through the grace of God, I’ve been abstaining one day at a time for thirty-five years and maintaining a weight loss of 75 to 80 pounds (34 to 36 kg) for over thirty-four and a half years.

What Is a Healthy Body Weight?

Having been a professional yo-yo dieter, I found that the hardest thing has been learning and accepting the amount of food and exercise my body needs to stay around the same weight permanently. What is a healthy weight anyway?

When I was 50 pounds (23 kg) overweight, I said I was a “healthy” weight, but it was a lie. On the other hand, my anorexic side is never satisfied with how thin I am, so I struggle with deciding what is a healthy weight. I have come to rely on fellow OA members and height-and-weight charts to tell me if I am healthy. I am 5 feet 4 inches (163 cm) tall and stay around 130 pounds (59 kg). At age 40, that seems to be a healthy weight for me. I still don’t like it. I’d rather be 125 (57 kg) or less, but I’ve been there and didn’t look or feel healthy. When I weigh over 135 pounds (61 kg), I feel fat and lethargic.

I weigh once a month to stay honest about my weight. When I see the weight creeping up, I know it’s time to inventory my food and start cutting back a little. I do not restrict my food or take second helpings. I don’t eat sweets because I’m more powerless over the craving once sweets are in my system. I eat real food—just in smaller quantities. I am able to attend picnics and eat in restaurants because I have a plan for what I’ll eat, and I ask God for the strength to stick with it as imperfectly as I can. I have learned to focus on the people around me, not on how much food I can eat.

To maintain my abstinence at work, I eat my breakfast before I go, and I pack lunch and eat it. (It’s easy to pack lunch and then conveniently go out for lunch thinking, I’ll keep my packed lunch for tomorrow.) Most of my coworkers know I’m an OA member, and they respect my limitations because they know I’m serious about my program. They don’t push food on me. I always say, “No, thank you.” Sometimes when I start feeling sorry for myself because I won’t eat something that is sitting around, I take one piece, wrap it in a paper towel, crush it, and throw it away. This helps me feel like I both had my share and have strangled the disease with my bare hands!

The hardest thing at work is office meetings. The company buys lunch for everyone, and everyone eats during the meeting. I could participate if the meeting time coincided with my lunch time, but it does not. My coworkers eat three hours after I’ve had lunch and three hours before it’s time for my dinner. Since I eat three meals a day with nothing in between, I am unable to eat with them because it is not my time to eat. If the smell of food gets too overwhelming, I pop a sugar-free mint in my mouth, and I always have my water. If the meeting disturbs me too much, I call an OA member or go to a meeting after work to help me cope.

The Gift of Maintenance

—Today, I am a recovered compulsive eater. After a lifetime of anorexia, bulimia, and compulsive eating, I have been gratefully abstinent for over three years. Even more of a miracle, I have been given the gift of maintenance. For the first time in my life, my weight has remained in a healthy
I have a daily reprieve from the disease, as long as I remain "in fit spiritual condition" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 85).

I have been a compulsive eater for as long as I can remember. I went on my first diet at the age of 8. After hitting 230 pounds (105 kg) as a young woman, I vowed to muster enough willpower to lose weight, or I would end my life. The diet of a lifetime began, and I lost weight. I became addicted to dieting and the daily weighing-on-the-scale ritual defined my worth as a person. Five years later, I was lying in a hospital bed; my weight was a mere 79 pounds (36 kg). I was spiritually, emotionally, and physically exhausted and devoid of feeling. I refused the radical treatment offered to anorexics at the time and once again promised myself I’d be strong enough to recover on my own. All I needed was willpower! The eating disorder then turned into a long cycle of bingeing and purging, eating compulsively, abusing laxatives, and exercise bulimia that lasted for the next twenty-five years.

At the age of 47 and weighing 220 pounds (100 kg), I was once again desperate and did not want to live. I was the mother of three, had a successful career, and was in a long-term marriage, yet I felt dead. I could not stop bingeing, grazing, dieting, starving, and self-loathing. I didn’t know it at the time, but a Higher Power heard my plea and led me to Overeaters Anonymous. Little did I know that was the beginning of the healing journey of a lifetime.

At my first meeting, I felt like I had come home. The love in the rooms of OA surrounded me. I did not think weight loss would be possible for me, ever. I believed OA could work for others, but not for me. I believed that others could have a loving Higher Power, but I was not deserving enough to have one of my own. I heard the message to keep coming back, so I did. I asked someone to sponsor me, began to work the Steps, listened, shared, and read OA literature. The gift of recovery began, and my Higher Power released 78 pounds (35 kg) from me.

Maintenance requires trust in a Higher Power greater than myself. As an anorexic, I was terrified that if I began to lose weight, I would not be able to stop. Other times, I wanted to buy clothing that was too big for me, fearing the inevitable expansion that was sure to follow. It hasn’t happened. I am wearing the same clothes I wore last fall. What a gift! Action is required on my part to keep what I have been given and to stay "in fit spiritual condition" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 85). It takes willingness and daily surrender. I use the Tools, have a loving sponsor, and sponsor others.

In recovery I have learned that I am not in control of the number on the scale. The disease tries to tell me the number is never good enough. Maintenance has proved the disease wrong. Thank goodness it is not up to me! I gratefully accept that I am powerless over food and compulsive food behaviors. Surrender has never felt so good. I remain grateful for my Higher Power and my OA family.

A New Way of Thinking—After Weight-Loss Surgery

I came to OA while I was losing weight after weight-loss surgery. I had already lost 60 pounds (27 kg) and knew that, without a plan, either I would not hit my target goal weight or I would regain all the weight I had lost. People think having surgery is a cheat, a shortcut. It isn’t. Weight-loss surgery patients can regain the weight just like those who have lost weight on any diet, and the repercussions can be more severe.

Six months before joining OA, I was in the midst of severe depression. I had hit bottom in all the ways a person can. I was isolating myself and feeling that life was just not worth it any longer. The funny thing is that I had so much, and I didn’t see it. I thought that the reason I was so sad, so out on the fringe of life, was because I was obese. But obesity and my need to overeat were just the results of a much bigger problem.

Fast-forward six years, and today, I see so much more clearly because of OA. I eventually lost 118 pounds (54 kg)—half of myself—and I saw that I had been hiding behind the fat for a dozen years because of unresolved anger, immaturity, and ignorance. Working the Twelve Steps of OA, I found that the program gave me the tools to create and live a balanced life, one that inspires me...
every day to work on the mental, physical, and spiritual. No part of the transition was easy, but it was worth it in so many ways.

— Each day, I still need to remove the old way of thinking and replace it with hope—even if I have just 10 percent. Because with hope comes encouragement—and with courage comes strength. Thank you, OA, for giving me a life worth living again!

Maintaining—Energized, Not Bored

— I have been in OA since 1977. I joined when I was 25 years old. My food and my life were totally out of control. I was 50 pounds (23 kg) overweight and had tried everything. I am grateful to say that I have been maintaining a 50-pound (23-kg) weight loss for thirty-seven years. It is possible.

— I want to focus on just the physical, practical aspects of maintenance. First of all, the bad news: I cannot eat the same amount of food that I did when I was 25 years old. I will gain weight if I do. Here is the good news: The changes are gradual, and the willingness is always there (or I pray for it). I do have a very Twelve Step-oriented dietitian who helps me keep my food plan honest and sane. This works for me. Second, I do weigh myself once a month. This is just a way for me to know that my food plan is appropriate for where I am now. If I see that my weight is creeping up three months in a row, I know it’s time for a tweak. The changes have been small and gradual, and honestly, I do not feel them.

— Another way that I maintain this healthy body is through physical activity. I love that, at 63 years old, I can still ride my bike and run. Not everyone is this fortunate. I have these abilities as benefits of this wonderful program. Here again, I have had to make tweaks so that I can be physically active for a lifetime. I have reduced the amount of exercise to what is appropriate for me (although my sedentary friends beg to differ).

— All of these physical changes would mean nothing if that was all this program was about for me. My healthy body weight is just a lovely side effect of committing myself to this program—working and living the Twelve Steps as a way of life and giving service at all levels. I know that I have enough. I maintain an attitude of gratitude about the way I live. My first sponsor said some very important words to me: “You can’t afford to be bored with this program.”

— I am as excited and enthusiastic about OA today as I was on April 19, 1977, when I first walked into the rooms.

More Than a Number

When I came into OA, I had over 100 pounds (45 kg) to lose. I had experience with another Twelve Step program, so I knew the OA program would work. I found a plan of eating and followed suggestions. I was one of those my group referred to as being “struck abstinent” and the weight came off fairly quickly. For the first time in my life, I had an average-sized body. More importantly, I was closer to my Higher Power than I thought possible. Many issues came up as the food obsession came down—things I thought I’d dealt with but hadn’t fully. With my mind clear, my options were clear. My serenity reached an entirely new level, and I was beginning to gain some of the self-respect that had always eluded me.

One day, a well-meaning member asked me if I’d reached “goal” weight yet. I had no idea what that meant. (My idea of a healthy body size meant there were no XX’s on my clothing labels.) I consulted with my doctor and a nutritionist, came up with a number I “ought” to strive for, and promptly lost my focus.

The word “goal” implies an end. It implies that once we have reached a particular weight, we are finished. We have arrived. My disease seized upon this idea and began to tell me that I could eat just like others, that because I was no longer obese, my eating disorder had vanished with my excess weight. It was like bingo—I hit the number, and my struggle was over.

For me, the struggle has just begun, perhaps because what I want is less tangible than a number on the scale or a certain dress size. I want food to have an appropriate role in my life. Though I stay within 10 pounds (5 kg) of what is healthy for me, my mind reels when I use food for other-than-
nutritional purposes. I want to form a healthy partnership with my meals. It is a constant challenge for me to remember that setting boundaries is not deprivation; it is safety.

It has been helpful for me to examine why I do what I do, to remind myself that I am taking care of myself, and what others do, in and out of our rooms, is not my concern.

I write down my food every day to avoid becoming caught up in planning “the perfect meal” or becoming overwhelmed with choices at mealtimes. I have a sponsor, and I commit my food to her to take the secrecy out of eating. I listen to her suggestions because sometimes I cannot see the sneakiness of this disease. I take what I like and leave the rest, trusting that if I make an unwise decision, my Higher Power will let me know. I go to meetings to remind myself I’m not alone and I have an eating disorder, no matter what the labels in my clothing say. I stay connected. We are all the same. Whether we binged or purged, no matter what our trouble foods are, I can always identify at a meeting.

Most importantly, I follow the Steps and practice these Principles in all my affairs, every day and to the best of my ability. I turn my food, my life, and my will over to my Higher Power. I pray. I read literature. I write. I make my best effort to be kind; when I am not, I apologize and let things go. I assert myself appropriately. On many levels, the inability to do these things is what kept me eating.

I have learned to trust my Higher Power completely, and the peace this brings me is indescribable and more delicious than anything I ever put in my mouth. My body size is a fringe benefit of this program. It serves as a reminder that miracles happen in these rooms. I am not at “goal.” I am at “life.”

---

**Individual Members’ Suggestions for Maintaining a Healthy Body Weight**

- **Maintain a strong, daily connection to your Higher Power through prayer and meditation, turning over your fears, resentments, and regrets (sometimes many times a day!).**

- **In my morning prayer and meditation, I ask the God of my understanding for an abstinent day. I commit a plan of eating to God, to myself, and to my sponsor.** I find that I’ve established a sort of rhythm with my food now, which feels natural and free.

- **If maintenance seems boring, I use a new Tool or focus on the Twelfth Step. Nothing revitalizes my recovery as much as working with a newcomer. I maintain a strong, daily connection to my Higher Power.**

- **Maintain a positive attitude, asking God to relieve me of the “bondage of self”** (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., p. 63) and to help me do God’s will. This gives me the serenity and emotional balance I needed to stay abstinent and live life on life’s terms. I remember that my worst day abstinent is far better than my best day in the disease.

- **I make a gratitude list and thank my Higher Power every day.**

- **I turn over my fears, anger, resentments, and regrets to my Higher Power—sometimes many times a day.**

- **Work the Steps daily and use the Tools of the program. I use spot-check inventories to identify behaviors that may signal the need for more intensive use of the Steps and Tools.**

- **I take care of my body, making sure I get adequate rest, exercise and to eat nourishing foods.**

- **If physical limitations occur, ask your doctor, physical therapist, or fitness consultant to suggest modifications so you can continue to keep your body flexible and fit.**
• I am gentle with myself. There is no one right way. I have found the way that works for me.
• I use the slogans, especially “live and let live,” “one day at a time,” and “keep it simple.”
• Accept that over time, I’ve had to adjust my food plan of eating to cope with an aging body and different nutritional needs. My weight or the fit of my clothes tells me how well my food plan is working.
• I remember that my disease is progressive; items on my food plan that I have enjoyed for years may become difficult for me to eat in moderation. I avoid them!
• I watch for old dieting or food-controlling behaviors, such as feeling the urge to weigh at inappropriate times, cutting portion sizes, or skipping meals without consulting a sponsor or a health care professional.

Achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight and a sane mind are the miracles of the OA program. Above all else, we continue to attend meetings because they are essential to recovery. We continue to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. We “practice these principles” in all our affairs. And we give service, because it is vital to long-term abstinence.

• If maintenance seems boring, I use a new tool or focus on the Twelfth Step. Nothing revitalizes my recovery as much as working with a newcomer.
• I maintain a strong, daily connection to my Higher Power.
• I maintain a positive attitude, asking God to relieve me of the bondage of self and to help me do God’s will. This gives me the serenity and emotional balance I need to stay abstinent and live life on life’s terms. I remember that my worst day abstinent is far better than my best day in the disease.
• I practice daily meditation.
• I make a gratitude list and thank my Higher Power every day.
• I turn over my fears, anger, resentments, and regrets to my Higher Power—sometimes many times a day.
• I work the Steps daily and use the Tools of the program. I use spot-check inventories to identify behaviors that may signal the need for more intensive use of the Steps and Tools. As I continue to grow and develop as a human being, I am able to share my recovery with others.
• I take care of my body, making sure I get adequate rest and eat nourishing foods.
• I am gentle with myself. There is no one right way. I have found the way that works for me.
• I use the slogans, especially “live and let live,” “one day at a time,” and “keep it simple.”
• Over time, I’ve had to adjust my food plan to cope with an aging body and different nutritional needs. My weight or the fit of my clothes tells me how well my food plan is working. I remember that my disease is progressive; items on my food plan that I have enjoyed for years may become difficult for me to eat in moderation. I avoid them.
• I watch for old dieting or food-controlling behaviors, such as feeling the urge to weigh at inappropriate times, cutting portion sizes, or skipping meals without consulting a sponsor or health care professional.
• In my morning prayer and meditation, I ask God for an abstinent day. I commit a plan of eating to God, to myself, and to my sponsor. I find that I’ve established a sort of rhythm with my food now, which feels natural and free.
• If I’m going to a restaurant for a meal or if my plans change, I decide beforehand, if at all possible, what I’m going to eat. This allows me to prepare an action plan ahead of time in a safe place—and walk right through temptations before they even happen. By the time I
get there, my commitment is firm.

Above all else, I continue to attend meetings because they are the lifeblood of my recovery. I continue to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps and to “practice these principles” in all my affairs (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 60). Service is vital to long-term abstinence.

LIVING IN ABSTINENCE

The Joy of Recovery

In OA, we don’t just stop eating compulsively or engaging in compulsive food behaviors; we did that plenty of times on diets. OA gives us a spiritually based program for living one day at a time. We are given a daily reprieve from our disease that is contingent on remaining “in fit spiritual condition” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 85). We know serenity and peace of mind. We know that we can be uniquely useful to another compulsive overeater by sharing our experience, strength, and hope. Today, we live life with all its feelings, and we have faith that if we work the program it will continue to work for us.

“Those of us who live this program don’t simply carry the message; we are the message. Each day that we live well, we are well, and we embody the joy of recovery, which attracts others who want what we’ve found in OA. We’re always happy to share our secret: the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous, which empower each of us to live well and be well, one day at a time” (The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, p. 106 Second Edition, pp. 86–87).

God grant me
the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change.
courage to change
the things I can,
and wisdom to know the
difference.

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.

[Conference Seal of Approval to go here if adopted]

How to find OA

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

Overeaters Anonymous®

World Service Office
6075 Zenith Court NE
Rio Rancho, NM 87144-6424 USA
Mail Address: PO Box 44727
Rio Rancho, NM 87174-4727 USA
Tel: 1-505-891-2664 • Fax: 1-505-891-4320
info@oa.org • www.oa.org
© 20TK Overeaters Anonymous, Inc.
All rights reserved
#XXX