

1 **To the ~~Teen~~Young Person**

2 **Do you have a problem with food, eating behaviors, or body image?**

3
4 **There is a solution...**

5 **If you're reading this, you may already think so. Asking yourself the following questions can**
6 **help you see how food issues affect your life.:**

- 7
8 1. Do ~~your~~ my eating habits change depending on ~~your~~ my feelings?
- 9 2. ~~Are you~~ Am I unhappy or frustrated with ~~your~~ my eating habits or body size, or with ~~your~~
10 my attempts to control them?
- 11 3. Do ~~you~~ I sometimes feel ~~you~~ I can't stop eating even though ~~you~~ I want to?
- 12 4. Do ~~you~~ I often eat more (or less) than most people do at a meal or throughout the day?
- 13 5. Do ~~you~~ I eat large amounts of food even when ~~you're~~ I'm not physically hungry?
- 14 6. Do ~~you~~ I eat normally in front of others, but eat excessively, or avoid eating, when ~~you're~~
15 I'm alone?
- 16 7. Do ~~you~~ I spend a lot of time thinking about ~~your~~ my body size?
- 17 8. Do ~~you~~ I try to control ~~your~~ my body size by fasting, purging, using laxatives, or exercising
18 for long hours?
- 19 9. Do thoughts of food ~~and~~ or my body image take up too much of my time and energy?
- 20 10. Do ~~your~~ my eating habits, body size, or feelings of shame about how ~~you~~ I look limit ~~your~~
21 my social life?
- 22 11. Do ~~you~~ I avoid physical activities because of how ~~you~~ I feel about ~~your~~ my body?
- 23 12. Do ~~you~~ I sometimes sneak food or steal money to buy it?
- 24 13. Do ~~you~~ I lie about how much ~~you~~ I eat or don't eat?
- 25 14. Have ~~you~~ I been told that ~~you~~ I really ought to eat more (or less)?
- 26 15. Do ~~you~~ I wish people wouldn't comment about ~~your~~ my body size or eating habits?
- 27

28 If your answer to ~~many~~ any of these questions is yes, you're not alone. Many, including young
29 people, including the young, suffer from the disease of compulsive (out of control) eating, whether
30 they are. The symptoms range from ~~can include~~ an overeating, to a bulimica, or an anorexica.
31 Whether you call the problem an ~~food~~ eating disorder or a disease, the good news is that there is a
32 solution.

33
34 Overeaters Anonymous is a Fellowship of individuals of all ages who support each other in
35 overcoming compulsive eating by working OA's Twelve Steps of recovery.

36
37 Most of us, no matter how hard we tried, could not control our eating behaviors. In OA, we found
38 people who understood us and gave us the help we needed through the Twelve Steps of OA. We
39 stopped our compulsive food behaviors, ~~lost or gained weight as needed~~, took action to restore our
40 health, and learned to maintain a healthy ~~life and~~ weight and life. We find that, so long as we
41 practice the Twelve Steps, we seldom have any desire to return to our former eating behaviors.

42
43 OA is not a diet club. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
44 We don't weigh ~~you~~ members. We don't charge dues or fees. We don't track attendance. We don't
45 tell you what you should or should not eat. In OA, we help each other make responsible choices ,
46 ~~not only~~ about our food (such as which foods and the amounts to eat), and how we behave with
47 food (such as when and where to eat), but also and about other aspects of our lives. Sometimes we
48 ~~need to talk more about~~ find that *what is eating us* than about affects how and what we are eating.

49
50 OA's Twelve Steps have helped thousands of people of all ages find new, healthy ways of dealing
51 with food and life. The Twelve Steps can help you free yourself from the prison of food obsession,

52 just as they have helped the young people who wrote the following stories.

53
54 **Ashley**

55 I'm Ashley G., and I'm a compulsive eater and food addict. I entered OA as a young person at 22.

56
57 Since the age of 10 or 11, I had gained 8 to 10 pounds (3.6–4.5 kg) a year. My weight steadily
58 increased to my top weight of 250 pounds (113 kg) by age 20. This means that, had I not been able
59 to stop, I may have weighed well over 350 to 400 pounds (136–181 kg) by age 30! Some of my
60 earliest memories of compulsive overeating include eating all of my and my brother's holiday
61 candy within two or three days of receiving it. I also recall eating fast food two to three times a
62 week, generally after evening activities. Compulsive eating affected me physically because I
63 experienced more and more weight gain and pain and fatigue related to my chronic illnesses.

64
65 My food addiction caused me emotional anguish. When I ate, I medicated my feelings. When I did
66 feel, I felt anxious, depressed, worthless, and self-loathing. I thought of myself as rejected,
67 marginalized, and condemned. I remained ungrateful and worried excessively. My life was insane
68 and unmanageable. Furthermore, this disease robbed me spiritually. I "prayed" to the food and for
69 the food. It was my Higher Power. I had little concept of spirituality.

70
71 I came to OA after my junior year of college. It was the first time I identified with other compulsive
72 overeaters. During my first year of abstinence from compulsive overeating, I became employed in
73 my career field, mended old relationships and started new ones, dated for the first time, and learned
74 to have fun. I was happy, joyous, and free without food! I experienced love and serenity.

75
76 In my second year of abstinence—with the love, care, and support of God, my sponsor, and the OA
77 Fellowship—I endured and persevered through a significant trauma. I have multiple chronic
78 illnesses, which I have had since my teenage years. An incapacitating flare-up resulted in my
79 disability at age 25. I lost my ability to be gainfully employed; my income; my ability to care for
80 myself physically; my independence; my new happy, joyous, and free life I had developed in OA;
81 and my safe, secure, planned future. I became severely depressed and plummeted into fear, anger,
82 and self-pity. I was stripped down to my core; I was bent and stretched to a breaking point. But I
83 did *not* overeat! I knew and believed that returning to my former compulsive eating ways would
84 only compound my already hard, messy, seemingly hopeless circumstances.

85
86 Connecting was a solution for maintaining abstinence. My sponsor suggested two phone meetings
87 a week and three recovery calls a day. Her suggestions were the lifeline I needed to remain abstinent
88 and manage the depression.

89
90 As a result, I became restored at age 26. I gained the ability to sustain abstinence year after year; to
91 serve and lead; to work part-time and volunteer with children; to have fun with family and friends;
92 to play the piano and tap dance; to be in a relationship; to have peace, be grateful, and experience
93 freedom; to love and be loved; and also to turn my will and my life over to the care of my loving
94 God in exchange for the power to carry out his will.

95
96 I am currently 30, maintaining nearly six years of back-to-back abstinence and a 100-pound (45-
97 kg) weight loss. I eat five weighed-and-measured meals a day with nothing in between and abstain
98 from binge foods. I write and text my plan of eating to my sponsor daily.

99
100 As I journey through my sixth year of abstinence, I am no longer gaining excessive weight brought
101 on by compulsive eating and food addiction. Instead, I am gaining a life beyond my wildest dreams
102 brought on by abstaining one day at a time and practicing the Principles.

103

104 **Nadine**

105

106 I come from a normal, functional family, although my parents are divorced. I have always been a
107 high achiever and never had an eating problem growing up. However, when I started high school,
108 I began to feel inferior and tried hard to get people to like and respect me. I became conscious of
109 my figure and the figures of girls around me, and I decided my stomach needed to be flatter, and
110 after a friend shared her diet, I stuck to a rigid routine of diet and exercise for six months, I lost
111 considerable weight and stopped menstruating.

112

113 My parents and friends began to notice I was too thin, and my parents took me to a dietician,
114 who advised me to include certain foods in my diet. I did and gained 7 pounds (3 kg), which made
115 me distressed and unhappy. My parents suggested I see a psychologist, who diagnosed me with
116 anorexia.

117

118 Anorexia made me feel in control and gave me a sense of power. It distinguished me from others
119 and made me feel special in my diseased mind. It also got me the attention I craved, resulting in
120 my unwillingness to get better. During a year of therapy, I became more ill and began purging when
121 I ate a little more than I would have liked.

122

123 At the beginning of eleventh grade, I directed and produced a school play and became “too busy”
124 to eat. My weight dropped to 77 pounds (35 kg), and my parents hospitalized me, despite my
125 numerous pleadings. I was admitted just before my 17th birthday and was petrified of gaining
126 weight, so I attempted to run away but was caught. Medical staff told me I would be locked up
127 if I did not cooperate, but my father didn’t want that, so he removed me from the hospital. We
128 pleaded with my mother to take me back into her home, and she agreed on the grounds I come with
129 her to work every day so she could make sure I was eating and refraining from purging.

130

131 In October, while at my mother’s work, I began bingeing. My inability to control my eating was
132 my worst nightmare. Despite numerous attempts to stop, my bingeing got worse, and I began to
133 gain weight. I became more depressed and struggled to complete my schoolwork because all I could
134 do when I came home was eat. My mother would often get angry because I had eaten all the food
135 in the house; she began locking the cupboards and freezer. But I still had access to food because I
136 drove to supermarkets daily to buy binge foods. I isolated myself and refused to attend social
137 gatherings because I was ashamed of the way I looked.

138

139 In August of my matriculation year, I had a minor car accident. At that moment, I decided life was
140 no longer worth living, so I overdosed on pills. My mother rushed me to the hospital, and the
141 doctors pumped my stomach. While lying there, I realized I had to choose whether I wanted to live
142 or die. Something told me I wanted to live, and my disease was standing in the way of my happiness.
143 I became willing to do anything to get well.

144

145 My mother heard about OA through a colleague and believed OA might help me. As soon as the
146 hospital discharged me, I attended my first OA meeting. What I found there was unlike anything I
147 had ever seen before. Here were people who understood me and were willing to accept me no
148 matter what. They told me I would recover from compulsive overeating, as long as I was willing to
149 work the program to the best of my ability and follow its suggestions. I learned I have a fatal
150 disease, and while I am not to blame for having the disease, I am responsible for taking simple,
151 daily actions to bring about my recovery.

152

153 The program does not just focus on my eating problems, but provides me with guidelines on how

154 to cope with life without compulsive eating or starvationing myself. It teaches me I have things to
155 do “just for today,” and I need to rely on a power greater than myself for direction. Through
156 practicing the program and using its tools, I have been able to refrain from bingeing and return to
157 a healthy weight. I can now participate in life instead of running away. I have a renewed enthusiasm
158 and zest for life that I never thought I could have.

159
160 So many miraculous things are happening to me. I have many friends who accept and love me as I
161 am, and I enjoy going out and socializing with them. I am in a wonderful, loving relationship and
162 am even able to study a challenging degree at my university. I no longer suffer continuous
163 depression and embarrassment about who I am.

164
165 I am grateful to this wonderful program for saving my life. I encourage anyone who has an eating
166 disorder, be it anorexia, bulimia, or overeating, to try OA.

167
168 It really works, if you work it!

169
170 **Tara**

171
172 I am 19 years old and approaching one year of abstinence from purging. I came into OA at 15,
173 around the time I first figured out how to purge. (I only came because my parents were longtimers,
174 and I grew up around the program.) Unfortunately, I was not ready for the message at that time. I
175 did not want to get better, but I was a people pleaser (one of my many character defects).

176
177 My lowest weight was 103 pounds (47 kg), and with my body type, it looked more like 83 pounds
178 (38 kg). But I believed I was a monster. I was dating a boy who was over 200 pounds (91 kg), and
179 I believed I was as big, if not bigger, than he.

180
181 Like any OA member, I was crazy with food. It inhabited all my thoughts, and I was unable to be
182 a real person. My parents took me to a psychiatrist, who told me I was bipolar. I may have seemed
183 bipolar, but only because I never dealt with what I was feeling. Besides being bulimic, I was
184 anorexic and an exercise bulimic overexerciser and compulsive overeater. Lucky me—I got the
185 entire package deal! It was not until later that I realized this was a gift.

186
187 My parents knew I was bulimic, but I tried as hard as I could to make sure they never heard me. If
188 they were near the bathroom, I would go into my room, turn my music up as loud as I could, take
189 out one of the trash bags I stored under my bed and purge in my trash can. While they slept, I would
190 sneak the trash bag full of vomit out to the dump.

191
192 As if eating five times as many calories as I should and then purging were not enough, to make sure
193 I burned off all the calories I would also bike 10 miles (16 km) until I was ready to pass out.

194
195 Today, I am the youngest person at the OA groups I attend. I tend to forget my age in these rooms
196 because, unlike most people in the world, the people in the rooms understand and accept me. I no
197 longer feel the need to go to parties and stuff my face with junk food like everyone else. It is a
198 difficult concept to explain, but I choose not to eat many kinds of food. I’m sure they would taste
199 great, but I never feel well afterwards, and insane thoughts fill my head again.

200
201 I would not be where I am today without OA, OA members, and my Higher Power. The best advice
202 I have is to keep coming back and take it one day at a time. As clichéd as those phrases have
203 become, they are true. One day at a time, my Higher Power takes care of me, as long as I let hHim.

204

205 **Joe**

206

207 When I was born, I couldn't eat. This worried my parents because I began losing weight instead of
208 gaining it. They took me to a doctor who, after examining me, told them that my stomach was not
209 yet developed.

210

211 My folks took me home and fed me with a teaspoon, until ~~finally, their~~ our ordeal was finally over;
212 and I could eat on my own. Naturally, my ability to eat pleased my mom and dad very much. In
213 fact, they were so happy, they continued to encourage me to eat.

214

215 And eat I did. I ate until I was fat. I hated being fat, so I ate to feel better. I didn't have any friends,
216 and people made fun of me, so I ate because of that too. I ate because of anything—or nothing.

217

218 When I started school, things got worse. I was just “fat” before; now people said I was both “fat
219 and ugly.” It was terrible being fat, but I had never thought about being ugly.

220

221 The older I got, the worse things got. I felt as though I was living in a nightmare. Even my own
222 family said bad things about me.

223

224 When I was in the second grade, three of my cousins came to live with us. Whenever I tried to play
225 or do something with them and my sister, they said, “You're too fat to do this,” or “Hey, Fatty, stay
226 down there and help lift things up ~~to me~~. That way if you fall the big boom won't be so loud.”

227

228 I tried to ignore their remarks ~~like that~~, but they hurt. It didn't seem fair that I was fat, and all my
229 relatives—my mother, father, sister, cousins, uncles, aunts—were thin. I was the only fat one in the
230 family.

231

232 I came to Overeaters Anonymous when I was not quite 13, weighing 151 pounds (68 kg). I had
233 tried many diets, but none of them helped me keep any weight off. I was a wreck physically and in
234 every other way. Here I was, a boy not yet in his teens, wearing the same size pants as my father.
235 There were rips in all my shirts because I kept growing out of them.

236

237 I was scared when I walked in the door of my first OA meeting. Then, when I sat down, I thought
238 everyone was weird. Now, after all the meetings I've gone to and all the help I've gotten, I know
239 that if everyone at the first meeting was weird, then I was too, ~~because~~ I'm just like them; I have
240 the same disease.

241

242 ~~But~~ Now, I don't think these people are weird at all. I think they are sweet, and ~~W~~with the help of
243 OA, I changed. From a kid with no friends, I became one with many friends. My nickname changed;
244 too, from “Fatty” to “Baggy Pants” ~~at first~~ —and then to “Slim.” I love every minute of these
245 nicknames.

246

247 **Caroline**

248

249 My name is Caroline. I'm 21 years old, and I joined OA nine years ago, when I was 11. I found out
250 about OA because my mom is involved, and I still remember her finally saying yes to my first
251 meeting.

252

253 I was always the child who constantly asked for dessert, hid my candy-eating from my parents,
254 snuck food into my room, ate all of the snacks in my friends' pantries, etc. Then, one day my mom
255 and I were talking, and I said something to the effect of “I could stop eating sweets whenever I

256 want to. I just don't want to." So, she made me put my money where my mouth was and offered a
257 challenge: to not eat sweets for an unspecified number of days or weeks—until she announced that
258 the "sweets fast" had ended. I asked every single day whether it was over, and when it was over,
259 you better believe I ate a ridiculous amount of sugar. About a year later, I finally realized what she
260 was talking about: I had a problem, I couldn't stop when I wanted to, and I needed help.

261
262 I want to start my story sharing about the rewards of OA, because a lot of the young person–relevant
263 part of my story is not necessarily full of gratitude. It's hard to be young in OA! And much of my
264 story has nothing to do with my age, so what I'm sharing is not necessarily the full picture of my
265 experience in recovery.

266
267 So, what do I love about OA? What gifts has it given me? Oh goodness, I could write a book. First
268 of all: Freedom! Freedom from myself, freedom from my fears, freedom from the ball and chain
269 that was food, freedom from other people's opinions ... the list goes on and on. Second: Gratitude.
270 Gratitude for this overeating problem, gratitude for unlikely friendships, gratitude for getting to
271 hear others' experiences without their advice, gratitude for the freedom I have received, and
272 gratitude for a Higher Power who is by my side. Another gift OA has given me is a toolbox full of
273 resources: people, phrases, prayers, slogans, exercises, workbooks, and books to help me through
274 everything. From feeling like eating that slice of cake on my birthday, to wanting to punch my
275 brother, to crying in the bathroom stall of my high school, I can use the OA Tools in every situation.
276 If you keep coming back, you'll see what I mean.

277
278 I have used many Tools over the years, including reading the Big Book, which I downloaded onto
279 my phone and could not recommend more! I was on a road trip once without any recovery friends,
280 and I felt uncomfortable making a phone call in that circumstance, but I did send texts to my sponsor
281 and read story after story in the Big Book to stay abstinent on the trip. I also use the Tool of writing
282 a lot; diaries, worry journals, or even word-vomiting all of my daily plans and current feelings to
283 my sponsor are tools that have helped me grow in my recovery and keep me abstinent.

284
285 I also have a food plan, which has been revised as needed, and I commit my food to my sponsor
286 early in the day when I'm able. Being a young person without a stable schedule can make it hard
287 to have a routine for my eating, so when things are stressful, or I have no idea what is coming in
288 my day (or who is feeding me), that flexibility with my sponsor is so important to me and my
289 recovery.

290
291 What is easy about being young in OA? I can make friends in a new meeting easily because
292 everyone wants to talk to me! Also, I get to listen with extreme gratitude to my fellow members'
293 long leads because I was spared many of the hardships that come with being in the grip of food
294 obsession for decades. I also get some amazing opportunities to speak at different events because
295 of my more uncommon perspective, which is so rewarding.

296
297 Being young in OA also opens the door to a whole new demographic of compulsive eaters still
298 suffering that OA alone can't always reach: young people. When I got to college, I decided that I
299 would answer honestly whenever someone asked me "Why don't you eat sweets?" Within the first
300 month of classes, I brought someone new to an OA meeting. And that one person getting help was
301 encouragement to me to continue answering that question honestly, because I want to share that
302 hope with other compulsive overeaters who are still suffering. I want to work Step Twelve. It's
303 incredible what kind of impact I make just because I have a compulsive overeating problem. Who
304 knew?

305
306 In many ways, being young in OA is only a big deal if you choose to make it one. Just as everyone

307 in the meeting has life experiences relevant to mine, I have life experiences relevant to theirs, and
308 connecting with what is shared in meetings is never a challenge for me. Using Q-TIP is helpful for
309 me, because if I choose to Quit Taking It Personally, I will have a more pleasant experience.

310
311 Being young in OA is also a wonderful and special platform I have used to help both my peers who
312 are suffering from compulsive overeating and my fellow OA members who are concerned about
313 their children. I work my program in a very similar way as most others: learning as I go, attending
314 business meetings, having a food plan, working the Steps, and going to meetings. I have been able
315 to benefit from the wisdom of older members, to help break down barriers between older and
316 younger members, and most importantly, to find recovery. I'm so grateful to have skipped over the
317 hardships that come with being a suffering compulsive overeater as an adult, and God willing, one
318 day at a time, I will continue to be a grateful recovering compulsive overeater.

319
320 **Alice**

321
322 When I came to OA, I was 25 years old and very resentful at life for bringing me there so
323 young. I envied members who had arrived when they were 40 to 50 years old because they
324 had way more time than me to eat my trigger foods—those foods I'm addicted to and can't
325 stop eating after I start. How could I stop eating them at 25? It was too soon! What about
326 when I get married? Could I seriously have a wedding without the cake I had dreamed about
327 for years? What was the point of getting married at all then? And what about kids? Could I
328 be a good mother without baking cookies? Won't my children love someone else's mom
329 who bakes more than me? And, most of all, how will I handle parties with people my own
330 age, where I used to eat a lot to feel comfortable and have something to talk about with them?
331 Food was part of my identity. What would be left of me without it?

332
333 Reluctantly, I kept coming back to meetings anyway and making phone calls to other members,
334 as had been suggested to me. Those people had something magical, greater than me, even if I
335 couldn't put my finger on it, and a part of me wanted it, even if the other part was fighting hard
336 to resist the program. Then, one day, a calm voice inside of me made me realize that there would
337 never be enough of my trigger foods in the whole world to satiate the pit in my stomach. So why
338 not start abstaining right now? It was as good as any other moment. I took a sponsor, bought
339 some literature, and started working the Steps of OA with her.

340
341 Today I'm 29, and I recently celebrated three years of abstinence. I feel lucky to have found
342 OA so early because I get to grow up in this beautiful program with great Spiritual Principles
343 and have stopped damaging my body in time. I finally found a blueprint for living that I
344 thought everybody had but me. I'm not missing out on life; I'm fully living it. I don't go to
345 parties just for the food anymore. I don't try to be someone else to fit into a group of people.
346 I have real friends and deep, meaningful relationships. I don't have to lie to my friends be-
347 cause they understand me. I'm less and less ashamed of who I am and of my weaknesses.
348 I'm starting to feel like I'm part of the human race and tenderly laugh at my shortcomings.
349 I'm even learning that I have good qualities and something to contribute to this life. My
350 confidence is being built, one day at a time.

351
352 Food is back in its place: fuel for my body. It's not my god, my best friend, or my lover anymore.
353 Hope is back in my life because I know I don't have to go through anything alone. I have the
354 Fellowship of OA, a sponsor, and a Higher Power to guide my steps and support me. I don't
355 worry about my wedding cake anymore. I want to get married for love and life partnership now.
356 And I believe that, thanks to this program, I'll be a loving mom, with a thousand other ways than
357 food to show it. I get way more from OA than I could have imagined, and for that, I am forever

358 grateful to have been brought to program so young.

359

360 **Bryan**

361

362 I am Bryan V., currently 26 years old with two and a half years in Overeaters Anonymous and
363 very grateful to have found OA.

364

365 I heard about OA when I was 22, when I could not walk the mile it took to get to class or walk
366 around campus from class to class. My daily life of living on negative calories, eating one and a
367 half meals a day, and compulsively running 5 to 10 miles (8–16 km) a day had taken a huge toll
368 on my body: I had a body mass index of 17, I'd experienced sudden cardiac arrest, and I had
369 developed stress fractures and arthritis from the knees down. My physical exhaustion also in-
370 cluded involvement in seven student organizations (and having positions of responsibility in
371 five), being a full-time student, and working in biological research on campus. I was an anorexic
372 and exercise addict who placed everyone else's priorities above my own because it gave me
373 excuses to neglect meals.

374

375 When my body forced me to stop, I withdrew from classes, quit exercising, and dropped out of
376 some of my clubs.

377

378 This was also when I started binge eating. In my head, it seemed like the only way I could gain
379 weight to survive my anorexia. Fortunately, someone at my school's student health office who
380 was a recovering member of OA suggested I would benefit from OA and invited me to attend
381 meetings. I didn't enter a meeting, though, until two years later. I didn't think Overeaters Anon-
382 ymous would work for me. In fact, when I entered OA, I believed my food binges were the only
383 thing keeping me alive and that OA would leave me defenseless against my anorexia.

384

385 I came into OA adamant that I was not a compulsive overeater. I thought I just had to find a way
386 to feel okay about being at a normal weight. I truly had no clue at the time that I was addicted to
387 certain foods or that I used food to cope with life. I didn't realize that I had already tried to stop
388 eating sugar when I was 18 and be gluten free at 23, and I couldn't do either one for even a day.
389 Nor had I connected my heart problems to my BMI or realized that I was at risk of developing
390 diabetes and following in the footsteps of my grandfather who died of it.

391

392 Once I recognized that food has always been my solution and grasped the spiritual significance
393 of this, I saw that I could no longer let my decisions be powered by my anorexic food phobias
394 and an obsessive list of "don'ts."

395

396 Today, I do not have the luxury of using compulsive overeating to save myself from anorexia,
397 and I can't use anorexia to fix my compulsive overeating. I've also accepted that there are foods
398 I just cannot eat because of my family's history with diabetes, and I see how high-calorie, easy-
399 to-eat foods had allowed me to live a fast-paced life that threatened my health and gave me ex-
400 cuses to miss meals. Now, my abstinence means that I don't get quick fixes; the solution requires
401 my effort and attention and will take time. My action plan is about planning meals, preparing
402 healthy food, and making sure I have that food with me.

403

404 In OA, I've found family in people whom I never would have expected. Before OA, I never
405 accepted others because I could never accept myself. I made decisions about them and what I
406 imagined they thought of me and immediately rejected them. I tried to play to what I thought
407 others wanted from me and hid behind the lies that I created to gain acceptance.

408

409 The disease of being compulsively unhealthy with food is cunning, baffling, powerful, and pa-
410 tient, and it can hit anyone, regardless of age, and make them powerless. I am fortunate to have
411 had experiences that led me quickly to desperation. I truly do not know how my God got through
412 my fog of diseased judgment.

413

414 Because of OA, I have been able to keep my first full-time job for over two years now. I was
415 hired three months after I entered OA, and without stability in my eating, I would not have been
416 able to keep up with the physical demands of my work. Before OA, I had never expected to live
417 past 25. Now, with over two years of abstinence, I have grown and become teachable. I sponsor
418 others and am humbled to be of service. Amongst other things, I am grateful to be a recovering
419 compulsive overeater, living in freedom.

420

421 **Olivia**

422

423 OA saved my life—or maybe I should say OA is saving my life, one miraculous day at a time. I
424 will celebrate my 21st birthday in May. This is a birthday I never thought I'd see because I'd pushed
425 the self-destruct button for most of my teenage years. A family member introduced me to OA
426 meetings and the Fellowship when I was 11. My early moments in OA planted a seed that has
427 finally started to bloom.

428

429 During my youth, I knew I had a disease—just knowing that is unusual. Most of my OA family
430 says I'm lucky to have found recovery at such a young age. But let me tell you, nothing spoils a
431 binge like OA! I never went to diet and calorie clubs because I knew they were a waste of time and
432 money. OA had the answers. The Twelve Steps could, if I was willing, rescue me from death by
433 food.

434

435 Nevertheless, I carried on with secret eating and morning-to-midnight binges, feeling consumed
436 and almost possessed by thoughts of food. I was a sugar junkie. I often tell my home group that the
437 only time I'd break into a run was for a "fix."

438

439 I'd purge by vomiting and using laxatives, with varying frequency. Then, around March of last
440 year, I discovered the pain and brutality of anorexia. I am a complete, qualified addict. I had to
441 check off the whole list of compulsive eating behaviors and be sick of my own reflection in the
442 toilet bowl before I was ready to take the First Step.

443

444 I'm now on Step Four, attempting to write my first "searching and fearless moral inventory" of
445 myself. It's hard work, and believe it or not, I've racked up plenty of pain, resentment, shame, and
446 fear in my illness.

447

448 What does all this equal? Gratitude! I am grateful for my life today, for being able to stand up in
449 the morning, and for being part of a program that can love and support me back to sanity. I make
450 no bones about it: I was insane without OA. My bond with my Higher Power becomes stronger
451 every day I stay abstinent, don't beat myself up, and let Higher Power run my life.

452

453 I often felt like I was born without life's instruction manual. It would fascinate me to see others get
454 it right while I got it so wrong. Now I have found the instruction manual; I just had to work it
455 because I'm worth it, of course! We are the lucky ones; we have a Twelve Step program of recovery.

456

457 **Jamielee**

458

459 I'm Jamielee, a compulsive overeater. I have been in OA a little over three years, and I recently

460 celebrated two years of abstinence from bingeing, white flour, and sugar and from sweets and other
461 foods that I ate compulsively.

462
463 I came into OA when I turned 16 because I was sick and tired of hating my body and letting food
464 control my life. I had tried a few diets that inflamed my eating disorder and led me to gain weight.
465 I motivated myself to go on diets by reinforcing my poor self image. I told myself I was worthless
466 because I was overweight, but I would have a perfect life when I got skinny. I bought clothes that
467 were in my “perfect size” to motivate myself to exercise, and I restricted my food to make up for
468 bingeing. So I lost weight despite my overwhelming urge to eat.

469
470 When I obsessed about my body and weight, I was very selfish. For instance, all I thought about
471 when going to a relative’s house was how to look good enough so people would tell me I had lost
472 weight. I had always felt like an outsider, like I was worth less than other people around me, but I
473 thought if I could become skinny I would far exceed those around me.

474
475 Food consumed all my thoughts and actions. I see now that compulsive eating gave me temporary
476 comfort, but it was always followed by more heartache as my eating worsened. As each binge
477 passed, I required more food to produce a similar effect. I would binge on one partially frozen
478 sugar product binge food while microwaving another flour product to hide in my room for later. I
479 wrote oaths to swear off food. I listened to tape recordings of myself saying not to binge, and then
480 binged anyway. I watched television episodes about weight loss and binged right afterward. I asked
481 my family to stop me if they saw me start eating after a certain hour, but I just waited until they fell
482 asleep and then binged. I obviously did not have a sane relationship with food.

483
484 Today, my life is tremendously different in the best way. I see the uniqueness in others and myself,
485 and I accept rather than condemn flaws. I was able to remain abstinent while I moved across the
486 country to attend a college that has fostered my love of singing. I’ve been able to enjoy rich, honest
487 friendships in OA. I have had loving, supportive sponsors who have helped me with my spirituality,
488 honesty, and daily commitment. I have met loving, interesting people from all different countries
489 and backgrounds who share my compulsion and now share my pursuit of a better way of living.

490
491 Every aspect of my life has been renewed as a result of OA. I have a new relationship with a Higher
492 Power and with my parents, friends, and myself. I’ve learned how to walk through fear rather than
493 run, and I now live a life that’s wide open rather than shut inside a box or bag.

494
495 I am grateful to be an OA member and to experience the support and love that is all around us.

496
497 **Amy**

498
499 I am a 17 year old, grateful, recovering bulimic, anorexic, and overeater. I remember first using
500 food for company after school in fifth grade. I was never fat, but my awkwardness made me
501 vulnerable to people’s cruelty. Because of my failure to be liked at school, I sought daily comfort
502 in food. Soon, I realized eating too much would make me fat, so I began eating large quantities of
503 food and then exercising like crazy. It was intense. I would often feel sick afterwards, but the
504 sickness was comforting because I believed it was a sign I wouldn’t get fat. (I’ve often binged on
505 healthy foods like fruit and nuts, believing they would counteract the “bad” foods.)

506
507 During high school, I learned ways to please everyone and to pretend I was worth their while, all
508 the time feeling like a fraud and resenting them for not liking me for who I was. But, I never showed
509 them my true self: a vulnerable, scared, and insecure girl. I didn’t know that’s who I was, because
510 I was much more absorbed with food.

511
512 At 13, I wrote down everything I would eat for the day. On the days I adhered to the rigid plan, I
513 felt smug and satisfied. But on the days I didn't— look out!
514
515 At 14, I found diet pills. These worked for a while, but soon I began taking them *after* bingeing
516 instead of before, which made me incredibly sick. I also used laxatives. These allowed me to binge
517 to my heart's content, but after feeling close to death on a toilet seat several times, I gave them up.
518
519 At 15, I started abusing exercise, believing it was a healthy obsession. No matter how exhausted I
520 was, I would slug it out in the gym or in 104°F (40°C) heat for hours to work off food.
521
522 When I was 16, people became cruel about my thinness. It was important for me to be liked, so I
523 began eating huge quantities of food in front of my friends and nothing much for the rest of the
524 day. People gave me many compliments on how much I could eat, which encouraged me to binge
525 more.
526
527 At college, I was desperate to make friends. I believed if I impressed college students with how
528 much I could eat, they would like me. My bingeing became constant, and I was vomiting at least
529 once a day. Every morning I would wake up saying, "Today, I am going to be stronger," but by
530 evening I was in the shower vomiting up copious amounts of food and thinking, "Tomorrow, I will
531 be stronger." It never occurred to me that anything was wrong in my life other than my lack of
532 willpower over food; it was the root of my pain and hurt.
533
534 OA has helped me believe in my own unique God, and, with love, he has taken the burden of food
535 away and given me a chance to discover the real sources of my grief and frustration. By
536 experiencing relief from food, I can be honest about my intentions. With faith, I know I will act on
537 these intentions in a way that will bring me peace of mind. I no longer pity others or myself. I am
538 deserving of the trust and love the OA Fellowship gives me, and I can now humbly give to others.
539
540 By continuing to strengthen my connection with God, I can live every day with faith. Living with
541 faith is all I need to stay abstinent and live a meaningful life, one day at a time.
542
543 **Dani**
544
545 Growing up, my life was basically perfect. I had a big brother to play with, my parents were
546 together, and we lived in a well-to-do community where I was showered with opportunities to grow
547 and flourish. I was smart, athletic, pretty, and outgoing.
548
549 "How could a girl like me have developed an eating disorder?" This is what I would asked myself
550 while I purged violently over a dirty toilet or sat alone in my room after again declining a party
551 invitation simply because food was involved. My pursuit of skinniness had taken over my entire
552 life. But how? I hadn't been sexually assaulted. My parents never put me through a traumatic
553 divorce. I had never even lost a loved one. The only flaw in my life was that my dad and I fought
554 constantly and had no relationship. So what? I had absolutely no excuse for "allowing" myself to
555 pick up an eating disorder.
556
557 Little did I know, this mentality was feeding my self-pity and feelings of worthlessness, which, in
558 turn, presented themselves as binges and restrictions. I was too busy blaming myself (and my dad)
559 for my disease to take any measures to treat it.
560
561 I wallowed in this cycle for over two years until I hit my rock bottom. I had to choose recovery or

562 death; I chose recovery. I went to my mom and some friends, who led me to OA. (I later discovered
563 this was my first act of surrender, in which I allowed my Higher Power to take charge.)

564

565 I had tried again and again to fix my dangerous eating habits through self-will. I tried to eat meals
566 without purging afterward, but I'd restrict a little more. I tried to stop restricting and instead went
567 running for an hour. Needless to say, every attempt failed, and I was quickly back into the
568 binge/purge/restrict cycle. I absolutely could not bring myself to the sobriety of following a healthy
569 meal plan through my own self-control.

570

571 This is where OA stepped in. People were willing to prepare my meals and serve me the proper
572 portions for two months straight. About a month into it, I finally realized I wouldn't blow up like a
573 balloon and become fat by eating again. Once the physical and mental sobriety set in, I was able to
574 start making my own meals. I opted to do it under supervision for the next month to keep me
575 accountable when the disease crept back into my thoughts.

576

577 I've now been following a meal plan, with my Higher Power's guidance, for quite some time, and
578 I've been returned to sanity and health. I try to slip back at times, but I always jump back on track
579 when I remember who I really need to put in charge.

580

581 **There is a solution!**

582

583 One of the things these young OA members have in common is that they didn't do it alone. You
584 don't have to either. Overeaters Anonymous will give you the Tools you need to abstain from
585 compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors.

586

587 At meetings, you'll find others who understand what you're going through and are willing to share
588 what they have. A sponsor cares especially about you and will share ~~his or her~~ their experience in
589 living and abstaining, one day at a time, using the Twelve Steps of OA.

590

591 Telephone Phoning, texting, and emailing keep you in touch with your sponsor and other OA
592 members. The telephone is particularly important when you feel tempted to engage in your
593 compulsion, want to share a problem, or just feel like talking.

594

595 Anonymity in OA is the promise of privacy. We guard each other's identity. What you share at a
596 meeting stays there. What you share with another member goes no further. Who we see at meetings
597 is held in confidence. OA is a safe place where you can be who you are.

598

599 Can you do this? Yes, you can. We ask only that you be honest, open-minded, and willing, and that
600 you keep coming to meetings. We think you'll feel at home in OA. You don't ever have to struggle
601 alone again.

602

603

604 **The Twelve Steps**

605

- 605 1. We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 606 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 607 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
- 608 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 609 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 610 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- 611 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- 612 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

613 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them
614 or others.
615 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
616 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we*
617 *understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
618 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to
619 compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.
620 Permission to use the Twelve Steps of
621 Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by
622 AA World Services, Inc.
623
624 **[Conference Seal of Approval Goes Here.]**
625
626 How to Find OA
627 Visit the OA website at www.aa.org, or contact the World Service Office at 1-505-891-2664. Many
628 ~~local telephone~~ directories also include local listings for Overeaters Anonymous.
629
630 Overeaters Anonymous®
631 World Service Office
632 6075 Zenith Court NE
633 Rio Rancho, NM 87144-6424 USA
634 Mail Address: PO Box 44020727
635 Rio Rancho, NM 87174-4727 USA
636 Tel: 1-505-891-2664 • Fax: 1-505-891-4320
637 info@oa.org • www.aa.org
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