

# About OA

The first Overeaters Anonymous (OA) meeting was held in 1960 in Los Angeles, California. Since that time it has grown to about 7,000 meetings in more than 80 countries—about 54,000 members.

OA is not just about weight loss, weight gain or maintenance, obesity or diets. The OA program offers physical, emotional and spiritual recovery for those who suffer from compulsive eating. Members find recovery on all three levels by following a Twelve-Step program patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous. Members who recover through the Twelve Steps find that yoyo dieting is a thing of the past. They no longer wish to return to eating compulsively.

OA is not affiliated with any public or private organization, political movement, ideology or religious doctrine and takes no position on issues outside of its own program. No membership dues or fees are required for participation in OA. The organization is self-supporting through members' voluntary donations and the sale of OA literature.

In OA, you'll find members who are morbidly obese, extremely or moderately overweight, average weight or underweight; still maintaining periodic control over their eating behavior; or totally unable to control their compulsive eating. The only requirement for membership in OA is a desire to stop eating compulsively.

Similar to other Twelve Step programs, a key tenet of OA is anonymity, which offers members freedom of expression, equality and safeguards within the OA community. Anonymity at the level of press, radio, television and other media of communication provides assurance that OA membership will not be disclosed. This protects both the individual and OA membership as a whole.

# Symptoms

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OA members experience many different patterns of food behaviors. These “symptoms” are as varied as our membership. Among them are:

- Obsession with body weight, size and shape
- Eating binges or grazing
- Preoccupation with reducing diets
- Starving
- Laxative or diuretic abuse
- Excessive exercise
- Inducing vomiting after eating
- Chewing and spitting out food
- Use of diet pills, shots and other medical interventions to control weight
- Inability to stop eating certain foods after taking the first bite
- Fantasies about food
- Vulnerability to quick-weight-loss schemes
- Constant preoccupation with food
- Using food as a reward or comfort

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For more information about Overeaters Anonymous visit [www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org).

# Questions & Answers

## WHAT DOES OA OFFER?

We offer unconditional acceptance and support through readily available OA meetings.

We in OA believe we have a threefold illness—physical, emotional and spiritual. Tens of thousands have found that OA's Twelve-Step program effects recovery on all three levels.

The Twelve Steps embody a set of principles which, when followed, promote inner change. Sponsors help us understand and apply these principles. As old attitudes are discarded, we often find there is no longer a need for excess food.

Those of us who choose to recover one day at a time practice the Twelve Steps. In so doing, we achieve a new way of life and lasting freedom from our food obsession.

## HOW DOES AN INDIVIDUAL JOIN OA?

No one “joins” OA in the usual sense of the word. There are no dues to pay or membership applications to be completed. Once we have heard about OA and believe we have an eating problem, we simply attend local OA meetings of our choice. Anyone who says he/she is a member of OA is a member.

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR OA MEMBERSHIP?

Our Third Tradition states, “The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.” Nothing else is asked or demanded of anyone.

## HOW MUCH DOES OA MEMBERSHIP COST?

There are no financial requirements to be a member of OA. This recovery program is available to all who want to stop eating compulsively, no matter how much or how little money they may possess. We are self supporting through members' voluntary contributions and literature sales.

## IS OA A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION?

No. OA is not a religious organization since it requires no religious belief as a condition of membership. OA has among its membership people of many religious faiths as well as atheists and agnostics. OA is, however, a spiritual program based on each members' personal interpretation of a higher power.

## HOW DO OA MEMBERS LOSE WEIGHT AND MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT?

The concept of abstinence is the basis of OA's program of recovery. By admitting inability to control compulsive eating in the past and abandoning the idea that all one needs is “a little willpower,” it becomes possible to abstain from overeating—one day at a time.

While a diet can help us lose weight, it often intensifies the compulsion to overeat. OA provides guidance in creating a plan of eating that may include identifying trigger foods and behaviors; working with a sponsor and a health care professional; and some food plans suggested by OA members, and approved by a licensed dietitian, that they have found success with. We don't furnish diets, counseling services, hospitalization or treatment; nor does OA participate in or conduct research and training in the field of eating disorders. For weight loss and maintenance, any medically approved food plan is acceptable.

OA members interested in learning about nutrition or who seek professional advice are encouraged to consult qualified professionals. We may freely use such help, with the assurance that OA supports each of us in our efforts to recover.

# 12 Steps

## ABOUT THE TWELVE STEPS

The Twelve Steps are the heart of the OA recovery program. They offer a new way of life that enables the compulsive eater to live without the need for excess food.

The ideas expressed in the Twelve Steps, which originated in Alcoholics Anonymous, reflect practical experience and application of spiritual insights recorded by thinkers throughout the ages. The greatest importance of the Twelve Steps lies in the fact that they work! They enable compulsive eaters and millions of others to lead happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which OA is built.

## 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.

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# Member Anonymity & the News Media

Overeaters Anonymous' (OA) most valued Tradition is personal anonymity at the public level. This means that the Fellowship itself is not anonymous, but its members are.

Overeaters Anonymous' Eleventh Tradition states, "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."

Media professionals have always been partners in establishing a tradition of their own to help members of Twelve-Step fellowships preserve their anonymity. We hope you will continue to avoid identifying OA members in your articles and interviews when you cover the recovery program. We ask that when covering OA, you use only first names or pseudonyms (indicated as such) of OA members and that you obscure the faces of those who identify themselves as OA members in on-camera interviews and photographs.

## **Protecting Anonymity in Print Interviews**

If your paper or magazine is doing a story on an OA meeting, all group members should be asked in advance if they wish to participate. Backs, hands, and feet may be photographed (with permission).

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## **Protecting Anonymity on Radio**

For obvious reasons, shielding a member's anonymity is simpler when there are no visuals; the member simply doesn't reveal his or her last name, or uses a pseudonym.

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## **Protecting Anonymity on Television**

Methods to protect a member's anonymity are as follows: shadow, silhouette, graphic scramble/mosaic wipe, out of focus/side angle, shooting hands, backs and feet, forced perspective, and vocal distortion.

# Speakers & Topics

Overeaters Anonymous (OA) staff and members from around the world are available to discuss their personal stories of recovery and can provide a national or local perspective, depending on your story needs and provided member anonymity is maintained.

In addition, health care professionals are also available upon request to offer insight on the following topics\*:

- Addictive overeating behaviors and symptoms
- Anorexia/Bulimia
- Causes of compulsive eating behaviors
- Health risks of compulsive over/undereating
- Obsession about food and body image
- Recovery from compulsive overeating using a 12-Step program

\*Health care professionals are not on the WSO staff or affiliated with Overeaters Anonymous but are supportive of the OA program as a solution to compulsive eating issues.

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# Media Contact List

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