The various manifestations of compulsive overeating

You are not alone.
Overeaters Anonymous can help.

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INTRODUCTION
The following passage describes how compulsive overeaters experience the various manifestations of compulsive eating. The passage was excerpted from the book *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition* and is offered here to professionals, newcomers, and other interested persons who desire to know more about us and our behavior.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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