

is simplified by the compulsive eater's newly and strongly held conviction that, "Just for today, I can abstain; I can let go of the self-destructive tendencies and grasp a new way of living." Underlying all our actions is the single most important concept in OA: that of personal powerlessness over our compulsion. The OA member admits that all efforts thus far have failed, totally surrenders self-will, and asks for help in making a new beginning. It is very important for the compulsive overeater to do this voluntarily; they must be allowed the dignity to choose their own path to recovery. The family can provide a great service by respecting this choice.

Sponsors help new members understand OA.

One of the nine Tools OA members use is sponsorship. The sponsor is the compulsive overeater's direct link to the program. They are a source of program information, later a confidant, and finally a friend. Based on their experience with abstinence and recovery, the sponsor offers strength and hope to the new member when everything seems confusing and threatening. The sponsor makes a commitment to be there when needed.

A sponsor can be a safe harbor in a storm—the storm of physical cravings and uncomfortable feelings experienced by some compulsive eaters especially during the first weeks of abstinence.

As recovery progresses, the family benefits.

The compulsive eater's obsession with food and compulsive food behaviors has adverse effects not only on the victim of the disease, but also on the rest of the family. As the newly abstaining OA member recovers and grows, it is not unusual for family members to become uncomfortable with the transformation. They may actually decide that they prefer the old compulsive eater—physically and emotionally unhealthy—to this person whose interests are no longer confined to home, family, and food.

It is not unnatural to feel a bit left out and resentful of all this newfound independence. But as the compulsive overeater recovers, in most cases, family relations improve. In the long run, families benefit enormously when a member recovers from the disease of compulsive overeating.

We care.

When a compulsive eater reaches out to OA, other compulsive eaters are ready to be there for them. We care. We really do!

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 oa.org,
or contact the World Service Office at 1-505-891-2664.



Overeaters Anonymous®

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INTRODUCING OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS

To the Family of the Compulsive Eater

*Family involvement
is an individual
choice...*



How do OA members “quit” compulsive eating?

Someone close to you has decided to get help with his or her food problem by coming to Overeaters Anonymous. To try to stop eating compulsively may not seem like a big decision at first, but it can be life-changing.

Many of us know smokers who have stopped smoking, alcoholics who have stopped drinking, and other groups of people who have “quit” using the substance or engaging in the behavior that causes them problems. The difference for all these groups is that they don’t have to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, gamble, or give in to their compulsive behavior to stay alive. Because we all need food to live, nobody can just “quit” eating. Compulsive eaters deal with their compulsion by refraining from indulging in the food and/or food behaviors that cause them the same uncontrollable cravings that alcohol causes alcoholics, drugs cause drug addicts, and so on.

In Overeaters Anonymous, we have an agreed-upon Statement on Abstinence and Recovery:

“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 and working the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve Step program on a daily basis.”

We find our problems with food take many forms. We use the terms “compulsive eating” and “compulsive overeating” interchangeably in our program to describe the many issues OA members have with food. These include, but are not limited to, overeating, under-eating, food addiction, anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, overexercising, purging, and other compulsive food behaviors.

Family support can help a compulsive eater who has made a commitment to stop eating compulsively.

How can families provide support?

Some families choose to join the compulsive overeater in their new way of life. Others do not. For example, there are families that read OA literature and openly discuss it, while some have never even seen it. Other family members may choose to adopt the member’s plan of eating or even decide to become a member themselves.

These matters should be determined primarily by the OA member’s personal inclination and the family’s decision. In the beginning, some members are not ready to share their program of recovery with people who aren’t in the program, even loved ones. Later, they may join the ranks of those who

welcome family members to the OA way of life.

The only one who needs to change is the person who wishes to stop eating compulsively. In this quest, new attitudes and outlooks are necessary. All that is asked of the family is that you patiently allow the recovering compulsive eater to do what the OA program suggests, even if you do not fully understand the process.

Changes mean growth.

Abstaining compulsive overeaters who are also working the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous not only recover from their compulsive eating, but also learn to maintain satisfactory relationships with family, friends, and other people, as part of their program.

OA helps people feel better about themselves as they come to realize compulsive eating is a disease of addiction and not a moral shortcoming. One of the first OA Tools the compulsive eater is encouraged to use to inspire this feeling of well-being is a plan of eating. The abstaining compulsive overeater who works the Twelve Steps and uses the nine Tools of the OA program begins to develop newfound feelings of well-being, self-worth, and usefulness to others. The abstaining compulsive overeater learns new ways to respond to problems that arise within the family and elsewhere, without turning to food for relief. From this beginning in OA, a new person begins to emerge.

It may seem strange to hear statements such as, “I have to do what is right for me.” But family members are usually able to overcome negative reactions when they realize that the OA member is suffering from a disease and is trying to recover by beginning a new way of life.

Behavior may be new and unfamiliar.

The early recovery period can sometimes be an adjustment for family members. Frequent phone calls may interrupt family meals and other activities. Meetings sometimes take up a great deal of the compulsive eater’s time. Familiar habits will change. The frequent absences and preoccupations of the compulsive overeater may be perplexing or downright annoying.

The compulsive eater’s behavior may be challenging for a while as they learn new ways of dealing with life without eating compulsively. Feelings formerly dulled or suppressed by compulsive eating behavior sometimes surface. Family members may feel threatened by the changes.

While working their OA program, some compulsive overeaters quickly experience the benefit of the program, which enables them to stop compulsive overeating immediately and effortlessly, often experiencing great joy and serenity as

a result of surrendering self-will. These individuals report great improvement in all their relationships, especially with family members.

It should be remembered, however, that not all OA members have this experience quickly. Through continued attendance at meetings and working the Twelve Step program of recovery with a sponsor, they too may have the same experience.

Cooperation is crucial.

It’s important to understand that these seemingly disruptive new interests—phone calls, meetings, quiet time, and catch phrases—are necessary to move the OA member forward on their road to recovery.

There may come a time when the intensity of these commitments lessen, but the compulsive eater can’t be hurried. OA is not a diet club. It is a way of life to be practiced one day at a time. This is the only assurance against relapse.

It is not the family’s responsibility to determine what the compulsive eater is eating or whether they are attending meetings. Change must come from the compulsive eater.

OA members do not love their families less. On the contrary, they wish to love everyone more. A fundamental concept in OA is that unless compulsive overeaters learn to love themselves, they are incapable of loving anyone else.

Sometimes the family of the OA member is most needed when they feel least wanted. At this critical point, the family can help immensely by being cooperative and patient. Asking the compulsive eater how you can help can be supportive.

Please keep in mind that we are an anonymous program, which means that we protect the privacy of our members. Only the OA member should disclose their membership in the OA program, if they choose to. This protection of member anonymity pertains to the privacy of all our group members.

Self-image improves by practicing the Twelve Steps.

Compulsive eating and poor self-image seem to go together. The only way to stop disliking oneself is to start liking oneself. But how does one change such deep-seated, and often unconscious, negative feelings?

The OA Twelve Step program of recovery is a powerful way to do this. We believe that changes in behavior and subsequent self-image can take place only if one makes a vigorous effort to study and practice the Steps. This effort