Overeaters Anonymous Preamble

Overeaters Anonymous is a Fellowship of individuals who, through shared experience, strength, and hope, are recovering from compulsive overeating. We welcome everyone who wants to stop eating compulsively. There are no dues or fees for members; we are self-supporting through our own contributions, neither soliciting nor accepting outside donations. OA is not affiliated with any public or private organization, political movement, ideology, or religious doctrine; we take no position on outside issues. Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors and to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps of OA to those who still suffer.
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I grew up in an American, Midwestern, blue-collar, motorcycle-riding family that fully embraced pride of all sorts—pride in our family, our country, our bikes, our tattoos and putting in an honest day’s labor. If family needed help, you showed up on Saturday and helped. You taught your kids how to fix engines, build things, and to listen to their mama.
You took care of your family, even if you got divorced. You did things because they were right, not because you wanted to do them. Man, I loved my family. I thought I had the coolest family in the world.

It was also true that almost everyone was addicted to something. Great-grandma and great-grandpa smoked. Another great-grandmother was about 400 pounds (181 kg). My grandmother smoked, dad overate, one aunt died of alcoholism, and another was addicted to anger. An uncle over-collected. Lots of cousins smoked or did drugs, and many drank.

One thing my family didn’t do was challenge each other about our addictions. I grew up thinking this was acceptance. Turns out, this was just denial hiding under love.

Despite helping each other with household tasks, party planning, and fixing vehicles, we never helped each other with our addictions, and we never asked for outside help. That’s how pride crippled my family. One cousin was in and out of rehabs, psych wards, and jail, but no one ever mentioned that.

One day a car hit me while I was proudly driving my motorcycle to my good job. I never asked for it, but starting that moment, I got help—a lot of help. A stranger gave first aid. Another called an ambulance. Paramedics provided life-saving care and took me to a hospital where a battalion of medical professionals continued to save my life. Then I received months of care from hundreds of others whom I never asked to help me. They did it because it was their job and the right thing to do.

By the end, I realized how dependent I was on the rest of humanity—my family did not have a lock on helping me. In fact, my family didn’t know what help I really needed. They sent me sweets of all sorts and didn’t know I was a compulsive overeater. Heck, I didn’t even know I was a compulsive overeater.

After I put on 40 pounds (18 kg) by eating everything that anyone brought me, I came to believe that no diet or exercise plan alone would help. It never helped in the past because I always did it alone.

It was not until I got truly humble and agreed to let thousands of strangers help me that I could begin my recovery. So, faithful reader, today you are helping to save my life. Thank you. I need you.

— Mard, Arizona USA

No Secret
Looking at my family photographs and reflecting on the last twelve years brings tears to my eyes. At my first OA meeting, I could barely hold my head up and say my name to pick up my twenty-four-hour abstinence chip, which I still have. I was 43 years old, remarried, twice my normal body weight, and the mother of a baby girl whose birth had almost taken both our lives.

My doctor told me to go to OA, so I went because I’m good at following orders. I “kept coming back” because at the close of every OA meeting we say that. No one ever locks the doors and keeps me out. I remember someone saying recovery is like a rollercoaster ride, and those rides scare me.

It is not just the weight or the food. Something magical happens at meetings if you’re willing to suit up and show up. If alcoholics and compulsive overeaters from all over the world are recovering, maybe I can sit still long enough to figure out what they have. The Big Book chapter “How It Works” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., pp. 58–71) doesn’t really tell you
A Slow Surrender

I am powerless over compulsive overeating and abstinent since September 13, 2014, by the grace of God. I joined AA on March 19, 1988, and OA shortly thereafter. I try to practice unconditional love and abstain from abusing foods that induce cravings, especially fat, sugar, and salt. I promised long ago that once I had recovery, I would do all I could to pass it on to others who still suffered.

Twenty-seven years ago, I surrendered at my first AA meeting. Somehow I knew I could never drink again, and I never have. In OA, surrender took almost twenty-five years. I slipped on a daily basis and binged occasionally, but I continued to use the Tools and the Steps. I kept coming back.

Step Three tells me to surrender to the God of my understanding. How is this done? I just stopped compulsively overeating, knowing I could never safely overeat again, that a slip was an insane choice. After three weeks of abstinence, the cravings left me.

I then worked the Steps and had a spiritual awakening halfway through Step Nine. In implementing God’s will, which I could now discern, the mental obsession largely left me. Still I look forward to its eventual, complete removal. It took me a long time to get this sometimes quick, sometimes slow part of recovery in OA.

I knew I could recover, I just didn’t know how. Then I heard that other male compulsive overeaters had recovered by using the Twelve Steps as described in the Big Book. So I focused on the Big Book. I also used the OA Tools of recovery, got a food sponsor, and weighed and measured my food. I slipped and slid, and then discovered what I was failing to do: surrender. I was still trying to diet and control my food.

When the miracle of surrender came, so did the understanding that a slip was not a sin or a mistake but a deliberate insane act. Once abstinence came, many other things I’d tried just fell into place: plans of eating, the action plan, putting cutlery down between mouthfuls, chewing not shoveling, shopping with a list, and cooking with healthy recipes.

I had not wasted all those years. I was
practicing to become abstinent, and I was learning by attending meetings and listening to others. Eventually, I saw the message I needed, and a new light entered the dark world of this compulsive overeater.

I do not intend to hide that light. My wife and I may soon relocate, and once that is determined, I plan to join or set up a men’s meeting.

I am writing about how all this happened, so I can better carry this message to those who still suffer.
— Geoffrey N., Tasmania

He Understood

I came into the doors of OA six months ago, weighing 159 pounds (72 kg) at 5 feet 5 inches (165 cm) tall. I was athletic and a relatively normal size, but I was in food hell and miserable. I believed that if I just got down to a certain weight, I would be happy. By the time I stepped through OA’s doors, I knew this was a lie. I had been skinny and fat, and neither extreme brought me happiness, only misery.

I thought I was the only one in the world who was obsessed with food, my weight, and my body. I felt I had to appear perfect so no one would know. In OA I found people who knew what I was going through and had been through it too! My sense of relief was profound. For the first time that I could remember, I had hope.

I work as a nurse, and last night at the hospital, I was reminded how powerful OA members’ connection is and why this program works. As I talked to the family of a girl in my care about their pain, they shared their newfound hope. A former patient in the unit whom doctors had given little chance of survival now visits the unit to talk to patients’ families about his experience. The amazing thing was that when he shared his story with this family, they all leaned forward in their seats and hung on his every word because he understood. In a hospital with specialists and staff who have tons of knowledge and expertise, the man who doesn’t have tons of knowledge about health care and doesn’t know this family at all is the one who brought strength and hope into their lives.

Wow, what a correlation to OA. The miracle of being understood is indescribable. I now have been abstinent for three and a half months, and my life has changed dramatically. I lost 17 pounds (8 kg) and gained joy in helping others, freedom from food hell, connection with my Higher Power, and serenity!
— Anonymous
Blessing in Disguise

< a gift that first appears as a problem >

Life Gets Easier

I was talking to my sponsee the other day. Just writing that sentence is a revelation—me, a sponsor? That’s something I thought would never happen, and something I would never be good enough for. When I was asked to be a sponsor, I was so stunned that the first thing that flew out of my mouth was, “Are you sure?”

Clearly, there was still a bit of self-will there or my HP would have helped me keep my mouth shut. One of many miracles is that I said yes. Now I believe my experience, hope, and faith can help someone else. I see how being a sponsor helps me live a life beyond my wildest dreams.

So my sponsee and I were talking about our food inventories and how long it took to figure out that certain foods were hurting us. To be crass, I joked that if I had a wheat product, like pasta, I need not worry about using fuel to motor me home because the natural gas from my consumption would see me safely to my door. And I ate like that
for years! Something I delighted in for a few minutes would wreak havoc on my body, causing a copious amount of gas, discomfort, skin breakouts, and worst of all, the loss of my sanity.

In retelling my story to my sponsee, I reaffirmed my stance on certain foods and my behaviors. Those foods hold a negative connotation, not an attraction for me. I associate them with all the negative words used in Step One on page 5 of *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*.

When I stop for a moment, I really do see this program living up to its promises. As long as I keep talking, writing, attending, and taking personal inventory, which all seemed very overwhelming when I first started, life does get easier.

My sponsee is my lifeline. She keeps me accountable, keeps me working the program, and keeps me sane.

— Karen, Australia

Thanks for Sharing

I haven’t written for *Lifeline* in a while, but today life got in my way. At least food didn’t, eh? But it tried to. Yes, even with fifteen years of recovery, the thoughts still sometimes make a plausible case for indulging. The Big Book says, “We are without defense against the first drink” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., p. 24), and defense must come from a Higher Power.

Last month I dropped my husband off at the sports arena for his part-time job. I planned to return two hours later to attend the football game. As soon as I pulled away, a “logic” process started: I could skip my dinner (the weighed-and-measured dinner I had with me) and purchase a snack at the game instead. The dreaded “no one will know” thought followed. I should have used my cell phone right away to make a support call. But I told myself that I didn’t have to decide right now because the game was two hours away. Oh, boy! Danger, danger! I went shopping. My husband and I were planning a cruise for our seventh anniversary, and I wanted some new shorts because my old ones were looking shabby. Can you imagine? I’m wearing out my shorts instead of growing out of them.

While trying stuff on, I got my size and the next size up, compliments of thinking, “You fat slob! You’ve gained weight, so you’ll need a larger size.” Thanks again for sharing, but the size 10 still fits nicely. As I tried the shorts on, a thought occurred to me: “How long would it be that way if I exchanged my weighed-and-measured dinner for junk food at the game? What would be next? How long before things returned to how they were before OA and I was struggling to pull up a size 24?” That thought scared me. Wow! That’s reality and the defense that comes from a Higher Power. After shopping, I ate my weighed-and-measured dinner on the way to the game. It never occurred to me to eat anything at the game.

Even when the friend who joined me offered food, I just said, “No, thank you.” Do you know he left half his bucket of food under the seat after the game? That still amazes me: people who can stop. Walking up the aisle to leave, I spotted all sorts of half-eaten things. The still-suffering addict in me wondered if the food was still “good.” The recovered addict in me says, “Thank you for sharing.”

— Gerri H., Titusville, Florida USA

Work the Workbook

Prior to May 1979, I was unhappy, overweight, and miserable. I ate to console myself, and things got worse with
every binge. The vicious cycle was a major part of my life, and I saw no way out.

Fast-forward thirty-six years, and I have been blessed with many miracles. Abstinence has become the most important thing in my life, and I live by the Steps, Tools, and Principles of the program.

One of the Tools I use is writing, and I encourage everyone to take advantage of the workbooks we have. I read Voices of Recovery with one sponsee, and we share what we write in the Voices of Recovery Workbook. I write in the For Today Workbook with another sponsee, and again we share what we write. The wonderful thing about answering workbook questions is that it is like working Steps Four and Ten. I feel layers peel off the onion every day that I write in these workbooks.

As an example, I'll share what I wrote for the question “How does continuing to practice the Steps and their principles give my life purpose and direction?” (Voices of Recovery Workbook, p. 57). I wrote, “I need to practice the Steps, the Principles, and the Tools every day to remind myself that I am a compulsive overeater. By continuing to use them, I allow myself, along with my Higher Power, to take my life in a more positive direction. Without following the OA program, I would remain stagnant with no direction in sight.”

Today, I can honestly say that I am a grateful compulsive overeater. If I had not had a food problem, I never would have found the Twelve Step program.

— Elmer Z., Oceanside, California USA

Woven More Beautifully

The Voices of Recovery passage on “Weaving the Fabric of Our Lives” (p. 8), which is also the title of chapter thirteen of Beyond Our Wildest Dreams, resonates with me because the image of weaving fabric represents my recovery journey. By using the Steps to guide my work and behavior, attending OA meetings, finding a sponsor, reading OA literature, setting aside time for spiritual practice, and doing service aligned with the Twelve Traditions, I am guided spiritually, emotionally, and physically by my HP in weaving my recovery tapestry. I’m finding serenity as my life comes together for the first time, one day at a time. I’ve been abstinent and blessed with recovery for over three years.

At first my tapestry had many snags because the yarns of my recovery were not used at the same rate. My physical recovery, becoming abstinent and losing weight, was woven more quickly than my mental or spiritual recovery. Next, the yarn of mental recovery provided a quieting of the mind, less focus on food, and glimpses of serenity. Then my spiritual yarn led the weaving pattern, and I became aware of the glory of serenity.

My tapestry was uneven, but as my recovery grew, open spaces in the fabric became smaller, patterns emerged, and my recovery became more tightly woven by the physical, mental, and spiritual yarns. As I healed, my program became stronger. I trusted in my HP and turned over the knitting needles and the loom.

Today I am aware I am not the weaver of my life, only the grateful messenger, and that recovery through the Twelve Steps and the Tools is possible, one stitch at a time. I am awed by my wisdom and see that before OA I was a raggedy cloth held together by threads. Today, I’m blessed to be woven more beautifully by the grace of my HP, my sponsor, literature, prayer and meditation, meetings, and the other Tools of the program.

— Anonymous
Shipwreck Survivor

When I was growing up, I had a lot of emotions to deal with. I never learned good coping skills, so I handled situations by eating over them. I buried feelings that were too much for me. It was either eat or go crazy, so I ate.

I like to compare my experience with a shipwreck. At first, I went merrily along on my steamship. Then disaster struck. The ship was taking on water, and the bilge pumps were overloaded. The ship was going to sink! It was every person for him- or herself. Put on your life preservers!

During my time in the water, the life preserver kept me afloat and alive. It was my friend and comfort. Another ship came by, and I was grateful and relieved when plucked from my watery peril. Still attached to my bulky life preserver, I refused to take it off and tried to function in the normal world with it on.

My life preserver slowed me down. What once kept me alive now impeded my progress. There is a saying: When God closes a door, he opens a window. I found that God had closed the door and opened a window too small for me to get through while wearing my life preserver. I had to take it off, but by now the knots were too tight to untie. I needed help.

I found help from the same people who pulled me from the ocean. They untied the knots and listened while I told them about my fear of going through the open window. They were there for me when I disposed of my life preserver. I put my hand in theirs and climbed through the window into recovery.
When I was a newcomer, other members strongly suggested I attain abstinence; in other words, remove my life preserver. I was still too afraid to face life without eating compulsively, so I kept my life preserver on. As I started working the Steps, I attained a certain level of growth. I could see the only way to gain more recovery was to commit to the Twelve Steps and to abstain from compulsive overeating. Through the grace of God and the understanding of fellow OA members, I said goodbye to compulsive overeating and shed my life preserver.

I have been in OA for almost six years and have a 50-pound (23-kg) weight loss. My life is more exciting now. I can do more things and go more places without that cumbersome, old life preserver. I have to climb through a few God-opened windows, but it’s not frightening, especially with my OA friends for support.

— K.B., St. Paul, Minnesota USA

Apply Love

“What we do have to offer is . . . a Fellowship in which we find and share the healing power of love” (The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, p. ix).

I recently shared my experience, strength, and hope regarding responding to someone who pushes my buttons. I shared how I literally apply love. When I am in someone’s presence and notice I am having feelings, whether feelings of irritation, annoyance, frustration, or anger, I silently affirm, “I love you,” repeatedly. I continue this silent affirmation each time the person comes to mind until the feelings subside or dissolve.

During my prayer and meditation time, I silently affirm, “I love you,” or simply “love” when a person who generates these same feelings comes to mind. I’ve used this affirmation with some people on and off for years. The result has been a shift in my feelings and attitude. In some cases, negative feelings diminished; in others, they were replaced by feelings of joy and genuine appreciation.

When certain people and situations come to mind, I may bristle, but again I apply love when thinking about them in prayer and meditation. The results have been astounding. Although feelings may surface, I no longer have deep resentments toward people. I give credit in part to this technique of applying love.

Applying love also works toward myself. “I am love” is a powerful phrase to dissolve feelings toward myself that no longer serve. Love is one of the ways I connect with my Higher Power. Affirming “I love you” is one of the two common ways I pray to my Higher Power. “Thank you” is the other.

Two spiritual principles I focus on in recovery are love and kindness. My “love shortcut” is one way I can apply these principles and transform my thoughts, feelings, and life.

I have learned in recovery that the love I crave is within me. These methods enable me to access that love in a powerful way. The Twelve Steps are the path that leads me to uncover the love within.

— Atiya, Raleigh, North Carolina USA

Three Sayings

I get to write this article. I am so grateful I learned this affirmation early in my recovery. It started with a phone call to my sponsor. When I complained that I had to go to work, she said, “You get to work.” When I told her I had to do laundry, go to the bank, clean the house, or do anything I didn’t want to do, she said,
“You get to.” It really makes a difference! In fact, when I forget and complain, others remind me that I get to because I have shared with them this wonderful way of overcoming resistance to things I don’t want to do. With a good attitude, I get to drive the freeway when it is busy, and I repeat, “I get to drive. I get to drive.” Attitude is everything. It really works if you use it.

Another good saying I use is, “It’s none of my business what people think and say about me.” It’s not that I don’t care what people think or say about me, but it’s none of my business. This has given me so much freedom! I don’t have to overeat because of what people might say or think of me. I love my new freedom; it’s what the program promised.

And I realized not everybody is going to love and like me. Before, I would do everything in my power to get everybody to love and like me, and I didn’t even love and like myself. This caused me to overeat, stuffing down feelings again and again.

I learned I needed to become my own best friend, and that is a full-time job. I treated others better than myself, and I did not know how to say no. I learned to really love and like myself, but there is always room for improvement. Now I can be my own best friend most of the time, which means I can be a real friend to others.

Last but not least, “Okay, God” is one of my favorite prayers. It is so easy to say, and it reminds me that I am not in charge. I say, “Okay, God,” throughout the day, and I don’t have to overeat. It helps me have a good attitude and acceptance of whatever is going to happen today and every day for the rest of my life. “Okay, God,” is a short form of “Thy will be done.”

— Edited and reprinted from S.G.V.I.E. Briefs newsletter, San Gabriel Valley Inland Empire Intergroup, May/June 2008

Stayed Abstinent

A favorite OA phrase of mine is “willing to go to any length” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 58). Practicing this has helped me stay abstinent, which for me is not eating foods with refined sugar listed in the first four ingredients, for twenty-one and a half years. For me, this phrase means:

- Attending at least two OA meetings per week. I usually help set up or stay after to talk to newcomers.
- Working with a sponsor.
- Being rigorously honest with my sponsor and home group.
- Asking for help to stay abstinent, make decisions, and manage time.
- Planning my food for the next twenty-four hours, committing my food plan to my sponsor, and preparing my food ahead of time.
- Reading OA literature, preferably before breakfast.
- Praying on my knees when I first get up. I say the Third Step Prayer and the Seventh Step Prayer. Praying on my knees keeps me humble.
- Giving service, which is my gratitude in action. I’m an intergroup representative, an imperfect Lifeline representative, and a sponsor.
- Taking time to listen to God, preferably in the morning. I sit still, breathe, and focus on one Principle or idea that I read in the literature that morning.
- Reading food labels and donating non-abstinent food.
- Staying connected when I travel, whether through meetings, the telephone, or online. Meetings are best.
- Practicing Principles before personalities and giving love and tolerance, even if others aren’t doing it my way.
If I am prideful, I create emotional separation from others and am unable to ask for support.

- Reaching out to others. Compulsive overeating is a disease of isolation, so I’m less apt to beat myself up or think I am perfect if I reach out.
- Attending OA events outside my hometown. Last year I attended a retreat that boosted my recovery and renewed old friendships.

By grace of a loving Higher Power and the power in the Twelve Steps, I stayed abstinent through attending college, dropping out of college, dating, becoming married, getting divorced, mourning my father’s death, and moving. Was it easy? No! While deciding to get divorced, I called my sponsor every day for two months because I was so shaky and tempted to eat. I’ve made calls or gone to OA meetings while at my worst, falling apart and crying. I’m sure I looked terrible, but I stayed abstinent.

I noticed today that I cooked too much food for the week—I’m nervous and fearful about finding a job. I need to turn this over to my Higher Power. I am willing to go to any length to stay abstinent.

Thank you for being part of this amazing Fellowship.
— Anonymous

It was 4 p.m., and I was experiencing food cravings. What to do? The Big Book instructed me to throw myself into helping others. “I could not expect to keep what I had gained unless I gave it away” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 253). I needed to call some program people and ask how they were doing.

I got out my little notebook of OA names and phone numbers. A newcomer’s name was on the list. Would she want to be called? Would she even remember who I was?

Despite my doubts, I called her anyway. She was happy to hear from me, and she definitely remembered me. My food cravings passed as we chatted.

I phoned her several more times over the next few months. We discovered we were both dog lovers, and we were very close neighbors! We made plans to walk our dogs in the park, and I really enjoyed walking and talking with her. Our walks became a regular habit.

In the meantime, my car died. I was having trouble getting to meetings, but the newcomer offered me rides. When I thanked her for them, she said, “Actually, your needing rides is helping me. It’s getting me to meetings when I wouldn’t go by myself.”

So my Twelfth Step came right back to me, and I have found a friend.
— Renee P., Austin, Texas USA
Now I’m Learning

I came into OA four years ago already knowing that the Twelve Steps work. I am a recovering alcoholic and addict, and not drinking or using drugs was my justification for bingeing for a long time.

The best thing about recovery is you get your feelings back; and the worst thing about recovery is you get your feelings back. So while I was in a treatment center for drugs and alcohol, my “forgotten” bulimia returned. Bingeing and purging made my eyes bloodshot and swollen, so I lied to my peers and said I was crying about my ex-boyfriend.

When I moved into my own place, I told myself I wouldn’t binge anymore and would buy none of the foods I had binged on in the past. I had no junk foods in my cupboards, but I still ate whole boxes of low fat, low calorie, and diet foods.

When I was alcoholic and homeless, I’d wish for a warm, dry room with a television. But when I got one, I couldn’t enjoy it because I spent the whole time bingeing and purging, thinking about food, planning what I would or would not eat, and calculating calories. Like an alcoholic drinking just one drink, I ate trigger foods but was careful not to exceed my calorie allowance. I walked for miles before or after a binge to offset the calories.

When my mom baked me a cake, I ate it and threw it up all in one night. When my parents came by a few days later for tea and cake, I said I gave it away to friends who didn’t have a cake. How wonderful I was for thinking of others like that!

My head was constantly fighting a very loud, terrifying, and exhausting battle. Shame, guilt, dishonesty, and feeling like a fraud finally drove me into OA. I didn’t get abstinent from my first OA meeting, but I thought I knew all about recovery. Hadn’t
I been sober and clean for two years? It was a frightening day when I found myself lying on my bed in the middle of the afternoon, fully clothed, semi-conscious, and drunk from a food binge.

I belong in OA, but sometimes my head will scoff at things I hear in meetings and say they don’t apply to me. After the meeting, I’ll feel or do the very same things that I scoffed at.

My journey in OA started with me jumping in the deep end and nearly drowning, but I’ve been dragged to the shallow end where I can watch and learn from others. I began by thrashing frantically to stay afloat, but now I’m learning to swim and have some fun.

Regular meetings, a sponsor, the Twelve Steps, service, and fellows who share their experience, strength, and hope make me better. Thank you, God, for this simple program of recovery and all that it brings to my life. I would be dead without it.

— Anonymous

My Favorite Color

I had an interesting realization about color and clothing. Being overweight, I always heard I should wear dark colors, especially black, to hide my large figure. But when I wear black, I get hot and tend to sweat, so I rarely wear it. Plus, black is not my color.

Now that I have joined OA and have lost over 60 pounds (27 kg), I have released my poor body image and concern for what I look like to others. I wear what I like and what is comfortable rather than what I think will make me look skinnier.

When I attended my twenty-five-year high school reunion, I found it amusing that I was the only one not wearing black. And even though I was thinner, I was still the largest one there!

I didn’t notice right away because I was feeling so good about how I looked compared to the last time everyone saw me. When I did notice, though, I thought how sad it was that those who were already thin were trying to look thinner!

The gift from this experience is how much God has healed my self-image and helped me feel free to wear my favorite color and to be myself. Thank you, HP! I’m proudly wearing orange!

— Lori G., Longmont, Colorado USA

Guilt-Free

Freedom from the guilt of overeating—what a concept!

Before OA, guilt wrenched me. It was my fault I was fat and unable to do something about it. I’m glad I jumped out of that depressing cycle.

Without the guilt I can focus on recovery, which should have been my primary concern anyway! The path of recovery led me to eat three meals a day and cut out all trigger foods. I cannot say I am perfect, but I am on the right track. I keep coming back for the support. I cannot do it alone.

— Crystal D., Chula Vista, California USA
Thankful for Freedom

On American Independence Day, I made a list of many of the things I’m free of thanks to OA.

Thank you, HP and OA members, for freedom from:

- The bondage of self
- Worrying I wouldn’t fit into last year’s clothes
- Trying to control people, places, and things
- Judging others
- People pleasing
- Worrying about what has happened or what will happen

I am also grateful for the freedom to:

- Say, “no thanks”
- Look for an alternative and change the things I can
- Make instant amends
- Forgive, even myself
- Dress becomingly
- Love, accept, and respect myself
- Ask for help from HP and OA members
- Share the changes I’ve made with OA members
- Make sane choices
- Reach out at meetings, by phone, or by email
- See how my experience can benefit others
- Live in the now.

—Jean A., Bridgewater, New Jersey USA

2016 Lifeline Topics

The WSO staff creates Lifeline from OA members’ letters. Monthly topics are suggestions. You may write about any subject important to your recovery from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors. Send your letters to Lifeline, PO Box 44020, Rio Rancho, NM 87174-4020 or email myoung@oa.org.

FEATURES: See pp. 16–17

DEPARTMENTS:

- Stepping Out, Service with a Smile, Living Traditions, and Taking the Spiritual Path: We always need stories related to these themes.
- Newcomers Corner: Newcomers, share your OA experiences and concerns.
- OA Around the World: Give us a history of OA in your country or area and short pieces from local members. Please send your history today!
- Generally Speaking (general OA topics) and How OA Changed My Life
- Main Attraction: Share your successes with public information and attraction.
- Ask-It Basket, For Discussion, and Web Links
- Share It runs only if sufficient material is available.

OTHER MATERIALS: Lifeline accepts letters, artwork, and photos (no faces, please) for publication. Credit lines and rights to submitted work apply equally to articles, artwork, and photos. The WSO does not return submitted materials. Lifeline may edit articles and crop photos. Lifeline promotes “unity with diversity” regarding the race, nationality, gender, age, physical challenges, and sexuality of its writers.

Please submit articles at least three and a half months prior to the first day of the month of publication. Deadlines appear in parentheses next to topics. Indicate the topic and month for which you are submitting the article. Typed letters by email, mail, or fax are preferred. Letters must contain the author’s name and address, even if the author wishes to remain anonymous in print. Thank you.
2016 Lifeline Topics

JANUARY
(Deadline: 9/15/15)
How OA Changed My Life
Describe your life before and after being in OA. Include your physical state before and after OA.

FEBRUARY
(Deadline: 10/15/15)
Abstinence Through the Ages
How has your abstinence changed as your body’s needs have changed through aging, pregnancy, or other situations? How has your abstinence changed through different life stages, such as living on your own for the first time, early parenthood, or retirement? How have you adjusted your program in response to life changes? How do you make OA your first priority? If you are a young person in program, how do you live for today while planning for your future?

Unity Day
February 27 is Unity Day, when OA members pause to reaffirm the strength inherent in OA’s unity. What does being part of the worldwide Fellowship of OA mean to you and your recovery? Unity is the spiritual Principle of Tradition One. Share your experience, strength, and hope as it relates to Tradition One.

MARCH
(Deadline: 11/15/15)
Recovery Is Attractive
How do you carry the message of recovery to others through attraction rather than promotion? What role does threefold recovery—spiritual, mental, and physical—play in attraction? How did someone first carry the message to you through attraction or threefold recovery? How does the OA Responsibility Pledge inspire you?

OA’s Virtual Fellowship
Share your experience, strength, and hope related to finding recovery and inspiration in OA’s virtual Fellowship.

Let’s Meet at Convention
Share your favorite stories from Conventions past. What opportunities does Convention offer to carry the message? What gems from Convention, Conference, workshops, or retreats sparked your recovery?

APRIL
(Deadline: 12/15/15)
New Body, New Life
How have you adjusted to life at a healthy body weight? How has physical recovery changed you? How has your body image changed in recovery? How has your experience of intimate relationships changed? What have you done to “shape a sane and sound ideal” (Big Book, p. 69) for your future sex life?

MAY/JUNE
(Deadline: 1/15/16)
The Right Tool for the Job
How do you use the nine Tools in your daily life? What is your experience using the action plan Tool? How does the plan of eating Tool help you with restaurants, special occasions, or travel? Which Tool do you use the most? Which Tool do you struggle with the most?
JULY
(Deadline: 3/15/16)

Generally Speaking
Write on any topic that has meaning for you.

AUGUST
(Deadline: 4/15/16)

Struggles, Stress, and Setbacks
How do you handle “life on life’s terms” in recovery? What has been your recovery experience during major life challenges such as death of a loved one, divorce, changing jobs, or moving? How have you maintained abstinence while grieving? How did you learn to keep coming back no matter what? If you relapsed, how did you get back on track? What has helped you remain abstinent over the days, weeks, months, or years?

SEPTEMBER
(Deadline: 5/15/16)

Changing Me, Not the Program
How do you use program to “build a bridge and get over it”? What steps have you had to take to “get over” yourself? How did Step Two help you “resign from the debating society” (AA Twelve and Twelve, p. 26) and get on with recovery?

Anorexia and Bulimia
Share your experience, strength, and hope related to using OA and the Twelve Steps to recover from anorexia or bulimia.

OCTOBER
(Deadline: 6/15/16)

Get Motivated with Slogans
How do slogans fit into your recovery routine? How do slogans help you with compulsive urges? How do slogans help with cravings? What slogans help you get unstuck and move toward recovery?

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER
(Deadline: 7/15/16)

Calling My Higher Power
How did you make contact with your Higher Power? What is your experience with the diversity of spiritual approaches in OA? What struggles have you faced when defining your HP? How do you maintain constant contact with your HP? What is your meditation routine? What gems can you share from meditation workshops? What have been the results of meditation in your life?

International Day Experiencing Abstinence
International Day Experiencing Abstinence is November 19. IDEA encourages OA members worldwide to begin or reaffirm their abstinence from compulsive eating. To celebrate the day, share your experience, strength, and hope related to starting and maintaining abstinence.

Celebrate the Season
How do you maintain abstinence during holidays and celebrations? Share your strategies for shifting focus away from food, dealing with triggers, and joining in the fun.

Holiday Magic
How are holidays in recovery different? Share your stories, inspiration, and reflections on living the Twelve Steps during times of celebration.
If I could skip one Step and “get away with it,” which one would it be? Why that one and what experience might I miss?

My first year in OA, I was a sponge. I received my gift of abstinence by absorption. I went to lots of meetings, hung around my OA fellows, and did no Step work whatsoever. Instead I did the OA two-step. I admitted I was powerless over food—that my life had become unmanageable. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of taking Step One, I tried to carry my message of recovery to anyone who would listen, even those who didn’t want to hear it.

A year in, I had lost weight and stopped throwing up. Fortified in knowing I was a compulsive overeater, I left OA, certain I wouldn’t do that stuff anymore.

A year of additional research followed, then ended when I crawled back to OA 50 pounds (23 kg) heavier, throwing up daily, and blessed with the gift of desperation. I was willing to do what was required to become and remain abstinent. I listened to those who had what I wanted: long-term abstinence; ease around food, people, places, and things; orderliness and sanity; joy and happiness. They all shared a commitment to working and living all Twelve Steps. Through the Twelve Steps, each one had built a sustaining relationship with a Higher Power, and that Higher Power gave them the daily gift of abstinence. Their part of the deal was to maintain a fit spiritual condition. So I start each day asking God for the ability to live each of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

I must take, live, and work all the Steps to become and remain abstinent.

— Diana G.
Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

The Value of OA

From the earliest times of Twelve Step recovery, almost every effort to carry the message has included a financial cost. The need to cover these expenses inspired the development of the Seventh Tradition.

We’re told that every group needs to be fully self-supporting, not only financially but also by sharing service positions to keep the meeting strong. We’re encouraged to speak up at business meetings to create an informed consensus and to insure the meeting formats are recovery focused and that they attract newcomers.

We become familiar with OA’s service structure and learn that intergroups, which organize events and retreats, put out newsletters, and staff hotlines that direct people to local meetings, are largely funded by the groups they support.

When we pass the basket, we call it “the Seventh Tradition” because it represents how we feel about being self-supporting. It’s more than a donation. It’s a barometer of our gratitude and our personal investment in our recovery.

Although my money was tight at times, I felt secure. OA had a lot to do with why I felt secure. I understood there were reasons, whether I knew them or not, for my hardship. I had faith that if I stayed abstinent for one more day, I could learn what those reasons were. Before program, I saw only the cost of something, never the value. I often felt deprived. To learn to see the value of something, I began to examine how often my priorities focus on my wants rather than my needs. OA provides for my needs.

What is OA’s value to you? Calculate how much you have spent impulsively on food each week. Imagine giving even a small fraction of that amount to support Twelve Step service and what it can accomplish. Calculate the costs of therapy, diet plans, and self-help books. Think of the time spent mindlessly watching television, playing video games, or procrastinating. Remember how unmanageable your life was before you came to OA and what it’s like now.

Groups and intergroups can be supported in many ways. Commit to a weekly donation that reflects your gratitude to OA. When a sponsee reaches a recovery milestone, send a donation to your intergroup in his or her name. On your anniversary, send $3 for every year you’ve been blessed with abstinence. Write a letter for the intergroup newsletter on a topic that is meaningful to you. Attend intergroup events and get to know your OA extended family.

OA asks us to give as if our lives depend upon it. Write a gratitude list every day and ask yourself how much OA has to do with it. Then give as if your life depends on it.

— Neil R., Baltimore, Maryland USA
**To Ask**

Humility has been a challenge for me. In the past, I think my focus was on feeling humble; I would try ways to make myself feel humble. I would change my facial expression, body language, and words to control myself into feeling humble. Maybe I was trying to control others, so that they would see me as humble.

I’ve had new insight when reading Step Seven: Humility is not a feeling at all! It is an action. This is a program of action. To ask is a concrete action demonstrating humility.

To be truly open to the answer, whether it is yes, no, or maybe, is to trust and have faith. To receive a “yes” to my asking and fully appreciate it is a gift of gratitude. To receive a “no” and receive it without anger is a gift of acceptance. To receive a “maybe” to my asking and to be able to wait is a gift of patience.

To ask is to admit that I need help, and that I can’t do it alone. To ask is to be vulnerable because I bare my soul and express what I need. To ask puts me in relationship with God and my fellows.

This is a spiritual program and a “we” program. Together we can do what we could never do alone.

— Maureen T., Canada

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**Web Links**

Discover interesting and helpful OA website links.

**NEW! OA Preamble:** Incorporate the newly revised OA Preamble into your group’s meeting. Find it at [oa.org/newcomers/about-oa/](http://oa.org/newcomers/about-oa/).

**NEW! Twelve Stepping a Problem:** Use the new writing exercise to face life challenges without turning to food. Download for free at [oa.org/pdfs/twelve_stepping_a_problem.pdf](http://oa.org/pdfs/twelve_stepping_a_problem.pdf).

**Datebook:** Let OA members know about your group or service bodies’ special event by posting it on OA’s online calendar. Submit info at [oa.org/pdfs/datebook_submission_form.pdf](http://oa.org/pdfs/datebook_submission_form.pdf).
**Don’t Disappear**

Last year, I reflected on whether I should run for another term as intergroup chair. Because of work and family commitments, I felt I was not as effective in the last term as I could have been. It was the second time I had served as an intergroup chair in my twenty-five years in OA. I wondered if I should rotate out, but I also feared that no one else would run for the position.

It took my sponsor having me do a Fourth Step on overcommitment and another member reminding me that I had been a region or intergroup officer for nine of the last ten years to convince me it was time to rotate out. Of course, the intergroup found worthy candidates, and the new chair is performing admirably, so my fears were allayed.

As I relished the thought of releasing such a large commitment, a longtime member said to me, “Don’t disappear.” She explained that she had seen other longtimers leave service positions not to be seen again—that they became bored because they believed there was nothing left to do in service. Eventually they returned to compulsive eating.

I appreciated the reminder, since all kinds of service opportunities are available to every member. Immediately after my term ended, I became a new sponsor to a couple of members, I became an intergroup rep for my home meeting, and I began doing outreach by posting about OA to a community website. I’ve been blessed with opportunities to speak at a few meetings, and I attend my home meeting regularly.

If I disappear from service, I will soon forget why it is so important for my recovery. If I disappear from OA, I will forget why it’s important to stay abstinent. The siren song of compulsion will beckon. Without my connection to service and the other Tools, I will blindly follow its call into the misery of excess eating and the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain that it produces.

The last thing I want to do is disappear from OA. The next-to-last thing I want to do is disappear from service. I’ll continue to show up and serve because every day these things stoke my desperation for recovery and abstinence from that first—and 1,000th—compulsive bite.

— Mike B., Baltimore, Maryland USA

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**For Discussion . . . AND JOURNALING**

Are you **Thankful for Freedom** (p. 15)? In what ways are you free today that you weren’t before beginning your recovery journey in OA? Make a list and celebrate your newfound freedom!
The God-thing must be easier for religious folks. I can’t buy a mass-marketed product called “God.” The hands of man must have fashioned that product out of necessity. It’s good that the founders added “as we understood” to the language of the Steps and Big Book.

I first felt God’s presence while in recovery during my worst emotional crisis. A flash of recognition convinced me that my worst fear had become reality. My spiritual awakening made me feel supported. But what supported me? What made sense was that the love and understanding of members at an OA meeting were supporting me. My feelings metamorphosed from a jumble of fear, destruction, pain, and sadness into a plush comforter of love, acceptance, peace, serenity, and a profound sense that Everything was Going to Be Okay (EGBOK).

EGBOK didn’t mean everything was going to be perfect. It didn’t mean life would be easy, my difficulties would disappear, and I would find bliss. It meant it was possible to accept life on life’s terms: “And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 417).

Was I accepting the God-thing? I don’t know. My phrase became, “God as I do not understand God.” To understand something, I must get a handle on it, wrap it up, tie a ribbon on it, and see where it ends and everything else begins. I cannot do that with God.

How was I supposed to “turn it over” with this God? What would this God do that I couldn’t do for myself? What could and would this God do if sought?

God doesn’t do things for me. My God-consciousness enables me to do them for myself. This often requires asking others for help, which pierces my ego’s veil, or armor, and opens me to benevolence and love. God-consciousness enables me to admit my powerlessness, surrender to it, and accept whatever gift helps me abstain from compulsive overeating. Though I may not get the answers to life’s persistent questions, I can accept that and go on living a life filled with possibilities. I like these uncertain and ambiguous possibilities. No ultimate reality exists, which keeps life interesting.

I feel supported, like the buoyancy experienced when we stop struggling in water. I let go of fear, and my trust grows. The more it grows, the more I release from my tight-fisted grasp. I sense something intangible and spiritual is supporting me. I suppose it shall remain a mystery, and that’s okay.

— Steven H., Irvine, California USA
Newcomers Corner

My Providential Blurt

As I sat across from my doctor and focused on entering my next appointment into my phone, another part of my mind took over my tongue.

“I’ve been gaining weight since I moved here last year. Can you give me some advice?”

For several months I’d been dithering about asking her for help. Now I felt shock—and immediate relief. She asked how I had been managing my eating. I kept tapping at my phone, afraid to look up. Providentially, that unfiltered part of my brain took over again.

“I’ve never been able to manage my eating.”

I was more shocked that I let that slip, because I always weighed and considered every word, every gesture, to keep my façade intact, even if everything inside me was completely unmanageable. Without hesitation she said I should look into Overeaters Anonymous. She told me OA could help with unmanageable urges around food, and I could find a local meeting on the OA website. Then she warned me that the members may be morbidly obese, and I might have a hard time connecting with them.

“But it’s the right place for you,” she said.

I left her office vaguely ashamed for blurting out my inability to manage a simple thing like eating. And what would I do if all the members were morbidly obese? How could they help me if they were unable to take care of themselves or if the program was such a failure for them? But I knew I had to look into OA. My alternative was a miserable decline, slowly drowning in my body.

It took me a couple of weeks to work up the courage to look at the website. I found a meeting and put it in my schedule. It was a week and a half away. That gave me time to get used to the idea. The afternoon of the meeting, I phoned the meeting contact to ask if they were still meeting that night. It was December 23, and I half hoped they would cancel because it was too close to a holiday. I didn’t hear back, and even though I felt high strung and panicky about it, my stubbornness helped me decide to go anyway.

I arrived and walked in to a warm welcome from the key holder. Some of my nerves subsided. The members were kind and welcoming, and they represented many sizes and body shapes. This group read Step One whenever a newcomer arrived, and that night I read my own life on those pages. I felt hope flicker as members shared their stories of recovery through working the Steps.

Clutching the Newcomer Packet, I felt real hope for the first time in over a year. There was an alternative to the dead-end future I was heading for, and I could have it if I kept coming back. I found Overeaters Anonymous. I found home.

— Liz W.
I would like to start a meditation meeting. Can you tell me where to find a suggested meditation meeting format?

The lack of a meditation meeting format on oa.org means there is no OA-approved version. According to Tradition Four, your group is autonomous and may decide in a group conscience meeting to create a new meditation meeting format, possibly by adapting one of the suggested formats available on the OA website in the Members/Groups section under the heading “Group Support.”

Another suggestion is to adapt the format that was used during the meditation workshop held at the Region Seven Convention a few years ago. The leader opened with the Serenity Prayer, gave a brief introduction to meditation, and then led us through her own guided meditation. The meditation lasted ten or fifteen minutes. I recall there was time to share experiences afterward.

You could also read from Step Eleven in the Twelve and Twelve books from either AA or OA. Both books are OA-approved.

— Members of the Board of Trustees provide answers to these questions
Letters must have a complete name and address. Please specify if your name, city, state, province, and/or country should remain anonymous if published.

Aptly Named

I wanted to share how this magazine is truly a lifeline. I came into OA in July 2013, and I became abstinent in October 2013. A Sunday meeting used an issue of Lifeline magazine, and it hooked me. I borrowed the issue and brought it to my home group to share how great Lifeline is. They agreed.

Praying Anew

I was very touched by the prayer published in the Newcomers Corner article in the December 2014 issue of Lifeline. As a very grateful, long-time OA member, I always learn something from newer members.
— C. Ellen I., Poughquag, New York USA

Maintaining Your Weight? Send Us Your Story!

OA is revising the pamphlet Maintaining a Healthy Weight and is looking for new stories.

We want to hear from all members and are especially interested in stories from members who had to gain weight to reach and maintain a healthy weight. Stories of weight maintenance from members who exhibit any manifestations of the disease, including anorexia and bulimia, are welcome.

Deadline: September 30

Stories of approximately 500 words have a greater chance of publication, and submissions are assumed intended for publication, are subject to editing, and become the property of OA, Inc. Submissions are not returned. All submissions must contain the author’s full name and address. You may request anonymity with publication. Your state, province or country may remain anonymous if you so indicate.

Email your story to info@oa.org with the subject line “Healthy Weight.”

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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.

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 Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services, Inc.
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.