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**TREATMENT  
AND  
BEYOND**

*OA support  
during and after  
treatment*

## 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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# **A special introduction to OA for men and women in treatment**

We of Overeaters Anonymous want to introduce and invite you to our program of recovery. Even if you are familiar with other Twelve-Step recovery programs, we believe the information provided here will help answer some basic questions about OA which are often asked by men and women who have undergone treatment at eating disorder centers.

OA members have come to recognize that the disease of compulsive eating is threefold: physical, emotional and spiritual. We've discovered that recovery comes through inner change. Our program is based on the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, as adapted by OA.

We are not a diet and calories club, a psychological counseling group or a religious organization. We have no leaders as such, only willing members who help carry the message of recovery to others who still suffer from the compulsion to overeat. We are happy to report that untold thousands have found recovery from eating compulsively by practicing the Twelve Steps and through fellowship with other OA members. We come together to share with one another our common experiences with the disease and our journeys of recovery. We invite you to join us and find for yourself that recovery is possible.

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## ***Is OA appropriate only when you are undergoing treatment?***

No. OA is available for ongoing support to all who suffer from compulsive eating. While your first contact with the program may come during the treatment process, OA itself is not affiliated with any treatment facilities. OA cooperates with treatment centers but remains a separate organization.

## ***How do you join OA?***

To join Overeaters Anonymous, all anyone needs is a desire to stop eating compulsively. If you attend OA meetings while undergoing treatment, you can consider yourself a member if you choose to do so. Following treatment, many members have said they've found OA participation a necessary part of their recovery. As one member puts it, "For me, treatment intervened in the progress of my disease, and recovery came through OA." As OA members, we've learned that the disease is progressive, but then, so is recovery.

## ***Does OA have membership fees?***

There are no dues or fees for OA membership. However, we are self-supporting and do "pass the basket" at meetings to help pay for literature, room rent and supporting OA service bodies and the World Service Office. No one is ever required to donate to maintain membership in OA. Members feel free to donate as they are able.

## ***Is OA open to men and women who suffer from all eating disorders?***

OA, as an organization, is guided by the Twelve Traditions. The Third Tradition

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states, “The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.” Although most members consider themselves to be compulsive overeaters, some consider themselves food addicts, bulimics, bulimarexics or anorexics. The common bond that qualifies us as OA members is our desire to stop eating compulsively. Each person determines his or her own eligibility for membership.

### ***What can you expect at an OA meeting?***

You’ll generally find a warm atmosphere where many members feel free to honestly express what they are feeling. Meeting formats vary. Some meetings are structured with a speaker or leader, while others include open discussions or study of OA or AA Conference-approved literature. Speaking at meetings is always voluntary. It’s important to remember that opinions expressed are strictly those of the person speaking, and not necessarily those of OA as a whole. Sometimes the closeness of the members can be somewhat overpowering to a newcomer. You may observe a wide range of emotions and a lot of hugging going on at meetings. We encourage you to attend at least six meetings before deciding if OA is for you. If you will keep coming back, we believe you will see that members are traveling their own paths of recovery through the Twelve Steps with the support of members in the groups.

### ***What is anonymity in OA, and why is it important?***

Anonymity has been referred to as the spiritual foundation of the program. We all come

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to OA as equals, all sharing the common bond of eating compulsively. Our outside status is irrelevant. Anonymity is important to the recovery of each individual in OA for many reasons. It assures us that we are free to express ourselves honestly and that what is revealed in meetings stays there. We've learned to keep the principles of the program separate from the personalities of the members.

### ***Why are some longtime OA members overweight?***

Because OA is not a diet club, there are no imposed standards for weight loss or maintenance. Many members do lose weight and maintain the loss through working the program. Members are free to choose their own ways of abstaining from eating compulsively; they themselves are the only judges of their abstinence and weight loss. As stated earlier, recovery occurs on three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. There are no set timetables for any part of recovery.

### ***Why doesn't OA recommend specific treatment facilities?***

The Sixth Tradition of OA states, "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." That primary purpose is to carry the Twelve-Step message of recovery to those who still suffer from the disease of compulsive eating. Experience has shown that when we concern ourselves with matters outside our primary purpose, we tend to lose sight of this guiding principle. Therefore, we find

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it most effective to concentrate on what we know best: sharing with others how we've worked the Twelve Steps. Our Tenth Tradition cautions us to stay out of public controversy; thus we've found it helpful not to promote specific treatment centers during OA meetings. Choice of a treatment center is an individual decision. We've found it ideal to hold OA meetings outside treatment centers, when possible, to maintain a clearer separation from specific facilities.

### ***Why doesn't OA recommend a diet?***

Nutritional advice can prove quite controversial, and we believe it is best dispensed by professionals. Our Fellowship is non-professional and not qualified to give such advice. Most of us have had to admit that any sound eating plan would be effective if we could honestly follow it. Many men and women come to OA knowing what to eat, but lacking the power to act on that knowledge. We've found the best way to find that power is through the Twelve Steps and by learning from the experiences of others who have followed those Steps. Recovery from compulsive eating is our goal. (See the pamphlets *A Plan of Eating* and *Dignity of Choice* for more information.)

### ***Will you need an OA sponsor?***

Sponsorship is a valuable and vital tool of the recovery process. Sponsors are OA members who are committed to abstinence and to working the Twelve Steps. Sponsors differ from counselors because they do not share professional knowledge, but share only from their own experiences about their disease and

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recovery. They have the perspective of having suffered from the disease of compulsive eating. Many who have been in treatment have found that having a sponsor before they left the treatment facility made the transition back into the “real” world easier. Should you find that there is a conflict between the advice of your treatment counselors and any suggestions of your sponsor, remember that your sponsor is strictly sharing from his or her own experience. Any suggestion from a sponsor should not be considered an “order” to be complied with. No sponsor speaks for OA as a whole. OA does not wish to contradict the advice of trained professionals. If you find you have a conflict you can’t resolve, you may choose to change sponsors; but keep coming back.

### ***Why is OA-approved literature emphasized?***

OA-approved literature assures members that the pamphlets and books they find at OA meetings accurately reflect OA’s program of recovery from compulsive overeating. Such literature also includes *Lifeline*, our monthly magazine written by and for OA members. The “Conference-approved” seal on OA literature indicates that the material grew out of the experiences of many compulsive overeaters in the program and that it has broad application to our entire Fellowship. The seal also indicates that the material has undergone a lengthy and careful review process involving the group conscience of many OA members throughout the world. You certainly may find other literature helpful in your recovery; OA does not intend to censor other material that members may find useful.



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OA groups choose OA-approved literature for use and distribution at meetings, since this literature seems to best represent the experiences of our members over the years. Literature is available at many meetings, or it may be ordered from OA's World Service Office.

### ***How did OA begin?***

OA was founded in Los Angeles, California, in 1960. From the initial meeting where three women first met, the Fellowship has grown to some 6,500 groups in over 75 countries that meet throughout the world on a regular basis.

### ***How can you find OA meeting places?***

To find OA meetings in your area, please look for Overeaters Anonymous in your telephone directory to obtain a local resource. Or you may contact the World Service Office at PO Box 44020, Rio Rancho, New Mexico 87174-4020 USA, 1-505-891-2664; or visit the OA Web site at [www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org) for information on meeting places, dates and times.

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## 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.





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