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.
What I really want is to be at peace with myself . . . giving the best thought I am capable of to each task that comes to hand.
— For Today (p. 129)

All forms of social media are an opportunity for public outreach and information. Using a social network site to let people know about OA is a great way to inform the public that OA exists.
— Guidelines for Anonymity in the Digital World (available on oa.org)

Send a bit or bite of recovery inspiration to info@oa.org.

Nov 30, 1960
I sat down at my typewriter to compose our very first piece of OA literature. It was a four-page booklet . . . the beginning of my many attempts over the years to extend a helping hand to other compulsive overeaters through the written word.
— Rozanne S., Beyond Our Wildest Dreams (p. 41)

Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide

Twelve Freedoms
1. Freedom from the obsession with food
2. Freedom from insanity and hopelessness
3. Freedom from the bondage of self
4. Freedom from dishonesty
5. Freedom from isolation
6. Freedom from running the show
7. Freedom from self-reliance
8. Freedom from blame
9. Freedom from fear of people
10. Freedom from complacency
11. Freedom from loneliness
12. Freedom from lack of purpose
— Voices of Recovery (p. 205)

In the word
HOPE is ever-present.
— Michele M., Clearwater, Florida USA

What I really want is to be at peace with myself . . . giving the best thought I am capable of to each task that comes to hand.
— For Today (p. 129)
In OA, I’ve learned I don’t have all the answers. I can depend on God. I’ve learned food will never meet any need other than the physical maintenance of my body. I’ve learned how to be vulnerable with others, and how to just sit with pain, allowing myself to feel it. When I permit myself to experience pain, it doesn’t kill me. Instead of the guilt and physical discomfort that bingeing causes, I find healing, relief, and freedom.

In OA, I’ve developed a vocabulary that I can use to talk with God, others, and myself about my problems. This helps me take a more objective look at them. I’ve also developed strategies for dealing with troublesome food situations. I’ve learned to throw food away if it’s threatening my sanity or abstinence; there are some foods I cannot allow into my house. I’ve learned that I must be accountable to others and honest with myself: I’ve learned self-discipline through the structure of staying on a food plan. At the same time, I’ve learned to be flexible enough to honestly assess my needs so I can make helpful changes to that food plan. I’ve enjoyed freedom from dieting and the victory of weight loss. I recognize early food panic and food thoughts that lead to binge behavior.

I’ve learned, and I’ve enjoyed peace, the Big Book page by page, I found not only hope but also faith in a universal spirit, a Higher Power that could guide me. But I had work to do.

I had to accept that I had to take action (quite a bit of action) every day, and be willing to listen and take Good Orderly Direction. Perseverance was key. I had to be willing to stop doing it my way and do it the OA way and the way set down in the Big Book. It’s been twenty years, and I’m still here, listening and learning, one day at a time. Thank you, OA.

— Barbara E., West Orange, New Jersey USA

Simple, Powerful Acts

Since arriving in the OA rooms, I have a new understanding of forgiving myself and others.

OA does not say I must be good or walk on my knees repenting. OA says: Make a list, go to meetings, share my despair and hear the despair of others, and listen to the solutions that each of us apply, one day at a time, to be free for this moment from compulsive overeating.

I know I will not hear this kind of talk sitting in front of the TV. When I am in the rooms or when I am at home, I know I am no longer alone in my struggle to put the food aside. I can choose to allow myself to feel what my body needs to feel, sometimes by calling an OA friend and sharing, other times by reading or writing.

By practicing simple, powerful acts of forgiveness as the Steps encourage me, I am free to flow to the next moment knowing that I am no better or worse than any other fellow. As OA says, no matter who you are, we welcome you.

— Nathan B., San Francisco, California USA

I’ve Developed Strategies for Dealing with Troublesome Food Situations

I’ve learned I must be accountable to others and honest with myself: I’ve learned self-discipline through the structure of staying on a food plan. At the same time, I’ve learned to be flexible enough to honestly assess my needs so I can make helpful changes to that food plan. I’ve enjoyed freedom from dieting and the victory of weight loss. I recognize early food panic and food thoughts that lead to binge behavior.

I’ve learned, and I’ve enjoyed peace,
freedom, and a deepening relationship with God.
— A.H., Goshen, Indiana USA

**Every Minute, Every Situation**

The key threads woven into and through my soul and my program of recovery are hope and gratitude.

The hope I felt at my first OA meeting was probably what kept me coming back, even though I wasn’t sure for what, besides weight loss, and even though my insides were twisted with pain, anger, and resentment. (I didn’t even know what the word “resentment” meant at the time.) I’d felt hopeless that life could ever be any different—I had no idea I would be around OA this many years later.

As recovery began, this thing called gratitude came alive in me. Now I am grateful for every minute and every situation in my life, however brief or long and no matter what the impact. I know these words are true: “If trouble comes, cheerfully capitalize it as an opportunity to demonstrate His omnipotence” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., p. 133).

My gratitude is expressed in continued service to OA; for without OA, I would not have my beautiful family relationships or the career I had. Instead, I would be a very lonely, bitter woman. Thank you, each and every one of you.
— J., Colorado USA

**Feast or Famine**

When something is eating away at me, I can discuss it with program friends.

When there’s too much on my plate, and I’ve bitten off more than I can chew, I can ask my Higher Power to help me prioritize.

When I want to have my cake and eat it too, I can remember it’s all in God’s hands.

When I’m dying to be thin, I can be sure my worth is not determined by the number on the scale.

When I can’t stomach something, or when I have a beef with someone, I can say a prayer.

When I’m stewing over an issue, I can remember I must accept life on life’s terms.

When I feel like I’m going bananas, God can restore me to sanity.

When I just can’t cut the mustard, program teaches me I am enough.

Whether it’s feast or famine, I sink my teeth into recovery.

— Kara M., Cranston, Rhode Island USA

**The Brave Person in the Mirror**

After being a full-time mom to four children, I find myself at a new stage in life; I am now able to travel with my husband when he travels for work. It is wonderful, yet at every hotel or motel, every resort or lodge, big or small, fancy or casual, I consistently find myself confronted with one kind of furnishing: mirrors. Lots and lots of mirrors. Full-length mirrors. Full wall mirrors!

Having been a compulsive overeater for as long as I can remember, I don’t have many mirrors in my own home. In fact, I have never owned a full-length mirror, and I certainly never wanted one in my bathroom. My highest recorded weight was observed by a nutritionist a couple of years prior to my starting OA in 2011; I weighed 324 pounds (147 kg).

Our program starts at Step One: overcoming denial. Because OA is a three-legged program (physical, emotional, and spiritual), my Higher Power has been systematically addressing my denial across all three arenas.

When I look in a mirror just after a shower, I see my real physical body—so many places I have never wanted to look. I see my whole physical self from all different angles. It’s both familiar and unrecognizable, comforting and shocking. I work a physical program in OA.

I’ve become aware of all the feelings that come up. How do I feel about what I see in the mirror? What do I call myself? Ugly? Beautiful? Old? Changing? Do I have any value? Is it too late to be better? I work an emotional program in OA.

Finally, how does my relationship with God fit into all this? What are my spiritual beliefs? Where do I place my hope? I am again offered an opportunity to admit that I am a compulsive overeater, powerless over food and food situations. Will I press
into my Higher Power, a being greater than myself, as I stand naked, having so many feelings, thoughts, and questions? I work a spiritual program in OA.

After about five years in the wonderful Fellowship of OA, I have lost about 55 pounds (25 kg). I have met the most courageous men and women. It takes a lot of bravery to look in the mirror and really see one’s true self. It takes help from this Fellowship to work through the physical, emotional, and spiritual issues of life. I have sponsorship, accountability, a food plan, a daily action plan, meetings, literature, and service, one day at a time. I am a work in progress, and I am well on my way.

Thank you, Higher Power, for OA!
— Anonymous

Scale Sanity

I sometimes hear about innovations in artificial intelligence. Discussions inevitably follow about how machines will take over and mankind will become their slaves. But this doesn’t scare me; I have already been a slave to a machine. I call it the Scale.

In my pre-OA life, I was either dieting or acting out in my disease and bingeing. The scale controlled or ridiculed me: It told me who I was and how to feel about myself. When I dieted, I weighed myself and waiting to show the measure of my failure. Whatever the scale said, my obsession with what it told me about myself made me miserable and crazed. I was its slave.

As part of my OA recovery, I had to learn to relate to the scale in a non-crazy way. So my sponsor and I created guidelines to minimize my crazed obsession. At first I weighed once every three months on the scale at my doctor’s office. In that first year of program, I weighed four times and lost a total of 97 pounds (44 kg).

I’ve been in the program three years now. That weight is still lost, and I’m not looking for it. Today, the scale doesn’t make me crazy. I continue to honor limits around its use to keep the insanity at bay:

I weigh myself once a month, on the same day, at the same time. I write the number in my prayer journal or another place I can look it up but not see it every day. (Nowadays I often don’t even remember what last month’s number was and must look it up to know how this month’s number compares.)

Most important, I say a pre-scale prayer my sponsor taught me: “Higher Power, this is your number. You control the number, not me. From one minute before I step on this machine to one minute after I step off, nothing about me has changed. I just have a number I can use to help me in my recovery.”

This is my formula for scale sanity. It works if I work it.
— Joy, Texas USA

Twelve Tools for the Road

On December 14, 2016, I was struck abstinent at the close of my first OA meeting. I’d blurted out that I could not give up a certain trigger food, then realized my foolish ravings came from a 312-pound (142-kg) man with a terrible food insanity. Since then, the OA Tools have helped me strive toward recovery. As I approach my eighty-fifth day of continuous recovery, I am nearing a 50-pound (23-kg) weight loss. In my quest to effectively work the program, I use the nine Tools currently recommended by OA, plus a few more I’ve found. For me, twelve is the magic number.

My plan of eating is a list of choices, like a menu. Six scheduled times a day, I simply prepare an acceptable choice from my pre-approved menu. More important for me is my food log; I record what I actually eat and the associated calories so that I track a balanced diet of nutritious, abstinent foods.

I worked the first three Steps with guidance from OA literature and my group, and I’m looking forward to sponsorship to help me work more Steps. Meetings (and conferences and retreats) have been essential for me. Dialogue, support, and suggestions come in many forms: in-person contacts, telephone conversations, email exchanges, and text messages. Giving service to others is the greatest gift I can give to myself.

I use writing to organize my thoughts, and I read our literature because it’s the lifeblood of the program. I write each day’s action plan the night before. There’s no time to obsess about food when I have plenty to do.

I see the Tool of anonymity as an obligation, a courtesy, and an assurance, so with it, I employ an idea I call “Right Thinking, Not Poor Thinking” to remind me to honor anonymity properly. When thinking about another person, I now try to see the good in that person rather than focusing on any defects I might perceive; I focus on principles before personalities.

“Listening to OA Podcasts” is an added personal tool I use. Hearing emotions in speakers’ voices is powerful.

I also use “Commemorative Objects.” At my first meeting, I was given a coin for newcomers that has the Serenity Prayer on one side. During tough times in my
recovery, I rub that lucky coin as if it was a rabbit’s foot. Soon, I’ll get a coin to celebrate ninety days of abstinence, and a medallion to commemorate losing 50 pounds (23 kg). This personal tool might not work for everybody, but, darn it, I find strength in rubbing a lucky object.

Finally, there’s “Mindfulness about Choices,” a handy personal tool I use when bad food thoughts arise. It’s a list of behavior choices—alternatives to overeating. My choices include exercise, meditation, chanting, gardening, singing, knitting, playing a musical instrument, and many others.

My math for calculating the Tools available to me could be seen as wacky; it is not often that nine equals twelve! Nevertheless, they are a great help to me as I work the OA program, and I feel certain that I am on the road to recovery.
— Paul M., Seattle, Washington, USA

Hear more stories by men in OA on the OA website at oa.org/newcomers/youre-not-alone/men.

What kind of a fool do you think I am?
What’s the point of praying to God?
But you say I need do no more than “act as if,”
and he will respond?

Such nonsense I have never heard;
I close my ears to those willful lies.
But you say, “That is his will;
Try! You will see with your own eyes.”

Act as If

So I do—I act the hypocrite.
I “act as if” he lovingly might care.
Lo! Daily, my life turns around.
My burdened heart is lighter, fair.

I do not tell him what to do,
nor send shopping lists to the divine.
I simply pray: “Help me, Lord.
Thy will be done, not mine!”

I want to hold this discovery close and tight
and keep it hidden with all my might.
But you question, “Why my cheery disposition?”
So to you I give this exposition!
— Anonymous

Keep Pedaling

When I was young, learning to ride a bicycle seemed like a monumental task—exciting, but difficult to learn. I wanted to do what the other children could. Riding a bicycle looked like fun, and I wanted to have fun.

My mom held my seat and ran behind me while I pedaled. When I wasn’t looking, she let go. The scariest part was when I realized she was no longer there. I had a choice: keep pedaling and try to steer the bike or give up. I chose to keep pedaling.

Being abstinent and working my Twelve Step program are similar to learning to ride a bike. It took much courage to come to OA, ask for help, find an abstinence that works for me, and work the Steps. I was scared to death, but I knew no other option existed. I chose to follow suggestions even when I didn’t want to because I trusted the people I heard in our rooms. I’ve learned daily disciplines—if I follow them, my life and program are often peaceful and serene.

I get into trouble when I become lax with these disciplines: attending meetings, making telephone calls, writing my food down, being abstinent, praying, meditating, reading my literature, and helping others in program. The same thing happens when I’m on a bike: If I slow down, I will tip over and fall.

The neat thing about program and the bicycle is that when I am shaky or feeling like I’m going to fall, all I have to do is get back up to speed. This requires practice. These disciplines become habit if I do them every day, so when I’m not doing them, something just doesn’t feel right. Then all I have to do is go back to what worked before.
— Norinne M.
Building Blocks

My “home” has been under renovation for the past sixty-five years. When I first walked into OA rooms in 1977, my home was mangled, beaten down, and full of holes. My efforts alone were not working, but it was hard to trust the process. I had failed so many times, and I did not want to wait—I was constantly frustrated. Something was missing.

Through listening to my peers, I found out that nine key ingredients, bonded together, would support my healing and construction. “Nine!” I shrieked. But before I could use them, I had to become honest and willing to listen. I had to stop trying so hard; I had to just surrender and let others help take care of me and my structure.

I had to find a plan of eating free of all my addictive foods and behaviors and work hard to accept that some foods had to be eliminated completely. A nutritionist helped me.

I had to go to meetings to get with others who had some solid suggestions. I had to find a wise woman who could lead and direct me so I could get out of my own way: a sponsor. My sponsor suggested I make some phone calls to others who could help me put this house up. Each person I called had lots of wisdom on how to link my work together.

Then this wise woman told me to read and write, and keep lots of literature and brochures by my side so I could refer to the manuals for construction. She also instructed me not to use any names of other contractors, so I would not jeopardize their building licenses.

My sponsor told me to do service to help other people build their own houses. I began feeling more confident about passing on the information I so freely had been given. My home was coming together, one brick at a time.

The last construction tool I began to use was a plan of action: I planned how to do all this, one day at a time.

All the screws and bolts were attaching more securely than they had in all the years I’d tried to build alone. Joy, peace, and serenity were filling my soul. I was feeling stronger, empowered to work on this construction. It was all coming together except for one detail: I needed a foundation to hold my house up. I discovered that this foundation is a powerful entity I had been missing all along: my God. I am now blessed with all I need to cover that this foundation is a powerful entity I had been missing all along: my God. I am now blessed with all I need to.

Now my house is on a solid foundation evolving into a beautiful home. My supports are anchored, and I am ever so grateful. Thank you, my dear God, for your strength and support. Thy will, not mine, be done.

— Susan S., Vero Beach, Florida USA

New Moves

In my recovery, I had problems trying to understand the OA program. It was simple, and that was the problem. I was baffled by its simplicity.

I also practice tai chi and enjoy the challenge of learning new moves, but what I find is this: The easy moves are hard and the hard moves are easy.

Standing at my front door one day, I thought, “All I have to do to get into the house is open this. I don’t need to do research on the door, find out who built the door, or figure out what the door is made of. None of that information will get me into my house.”

I like to analyze things. I think if I get things figured out, I’ll move forward. But logic won’t always help and some things can’t be explained. This program isn’t about the Steps we analyze, it’s about the Steps we take. I can take action, not let fear run my life, and trust HP that action will work for me.

— Bill B., Vancouver, Washington USA

Unwrapping

For me, being a compulsive overeater is a gift. It came wrapped in ugly, grimy paper, but it’s still a gift. The ugly paper represents how my illness treated me: It made me eat so much I got really fat, made it so that even if I did lose weight I gained it back, and it made a gluton of me. I would eat not for sustenance but for a kind of maniacal pleasure; food itself was a kind of maniacal pleasure; food itself had control over my eating, instead of me choosing to eat the kinds and amounts of food that would support my health.

The part inside the wrapping, being a compulsive overeater, isn’t pretty, and no one likes it, but without it, who among us would have been drawn to the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve Step program?

So, for me, being a compulsive overeater is indeed a gift, the true value of which can only be understood when the grotesque outer wrapping is discarded and the gift inside is discovered, a discovery made by working the OA Twelve Step program of recovery.

The gift inside is life and learning about life—the way it really works.

— Michael B., San Mateo, California USA

“Being a compulsive overeater isn’t pretty, and no one likes it, but without it, who among us would have been drawn to the OA Twelve Step program?”
The Addict Mask

It is not my job to fight the addict.
It has never been my job to fight the addict.
I can’t fight the addict.
The addict is too strong and powerful for me.
The addict is nasty. He plays by no rules.
He lies, cheats, steals, and will do anything to destroy me.

The addict wears a mask:
This mask is me.
He looks like me, talks like me, sounds like me;
I cannot tell us apart.
I cannot put a credit card between us.
His voice is not higher or lower than mine.
There is no doorbell ringing to warn me he is here.

I think he is me.
I believe I am listening to myself.
I believe his words, but he isn’t me.
He is not truth.
I need help with discernment.

I cannot fight the addict.
God fights the addict.
God wrestles the addict, battles the addict.
God goes to war with the addict.

I have to be diligent. This is WAR for me.
I must have a Power greater than myself to help me.
I have my part; my part is to work
the Overeaters Anonymous program.

Attend meetings
Get a sponsor
Study the Big Book
Work the Steps
Do service—take action—do my part, and

God removes the addiction.
God overpowers the addict.

The addiction is cunning, baffling, and powerful,
but the program is more powerful.
The program has God.

— Anonymous

I Can Live with OA

Working It

I have been in the rooms of OA for over eight years. The feeling of being recovered eluded me until recently—but now, through fearlessly and fully working the Twelve Steps, I have finally found the joys and promises of Overeaters Anonymous.

Just like many others who share this addiction, I am a true people pleaser and always want to be perfect. Unfortunately, these tendencies were challenged a few weeks ago at my job. My supervisor had given me clear directions and tasks to accomplish, and I was to finish them before I left for a long weekend. I had not done this type of work before but was quite certain I understood her expectations. I made a great effort to complete the tasks: making coding changes, documenting the changes in detail with emails and screen-shots, and loading the new coding onto our systems. I was exhausted, but pleased with my accomplishments.

When I returned to work the following week, I found I had not done these tasks correctly. Books were printed wrong, and codes did not work as planned. My supervisor was polite and kind when she explained this to me, but she also said she’d totally lost confidence in me. She had a coworker inspect my next task prior to its release.

I totally understood her reasoning, but as I listened, I felt so defeated and disappointed with myself. She had been sick that weekend with a fever, her uncle had passed away, and her mom was in cardiac rehab. And then she had to come into work to fix my screwup.

Now I can talk about the miracle. As I processed what she told me, the thought
I had no respect for my possessions or the money I’d invested in them. I would frequently break and ruin items through carelessness or have to purchase a duplicate of something I’d lost. I never attempted to organize anything until after one year of recovery. OA prepared me to acknowledge this unmanageability and tackle the clutter, box by box. My heart sank each time I came across an empty candy wrapper, fast food receipt, or scrap of grocery packaging I’d hidden away.

I also discovered enough unopened mail to fill three plastic garbage bags. Among bogus credit card offers and expired coupons, I found precious family photos, keepsakes, and urgent letters from a dear college confidante: “Why have you stopped calling me? I’m your friend, and I want to help with whatever’s troubling you.” The seals on business correspondence had similarly been left intact. If I received a bill from a creditor I knew I couldn’t pay, I’d simply ignore it. I ate compulsively to escape from reality and was spiritually incapable of acknowledging that I spent every cent on food.

That cluttered basement was a sad testimony to my emotional turmoil; a fitting metaphor for the distorted values by which I had been living as a food addict.

Too much was not enough. With a thick layer of denial (junk) to insulate me from reality, I had been mired in my own self-loathing.

Knowing the garbage truck was due the next morning, I worked feverishly by moonlight, dragging trash to the curb one heavy bag at a time. My eyes moistened with tears of joy when I awoke the next morning, I worked feverishly by moonlight, dragging trash to the curb one heavy bag at a time. My eyes moistened with tears of joy when I awoke the next morning. I worked feverishly by moonlight, dragging trash to the curb one heavy bag at a time. My eyes moistened with tears of joy when I awoke the next morning.

The teacher looked around and said, “None of this would have happened without my recovery. First of all, if not for OA, I wouldn’t even be in a dance class—I’d either be sitting on the couch bingeing, or else over-exercising to burn calories and punish myself for eating. (I wouldn’t have wasted my time doing something that didn’t burn maximum calories.) But even if I had managed to get to a dance class, before recovery, I would never have been able to ask for help in front of classmates who already understood a step sequence.

On my way home, I realized that none of this would have happened without my recovery. First of all, if not for OA, I wouldn’t even be in a dance class—I’d either be sitting on the couch bingeing, or else over-exercising to burn calories and punish myself for eating. (I wouldn’t have wasted my time doing something that didn’t burn maximum calories.) But even if I had managed to get to a dance class, before recovery, I would never have been able to ask for help in front of classmates who already understood a step sequence.
I didn’t get the steps perfect right away, and reach out for help. I can listen to a teacher with an open mind, even after I thought I might not understand. And, because of recovery, I can appreciate and be grateful for this whole situation. It may be “just” a dance class, but it’s also fulfilling, something I’ve dreamed of doing.

If I can practice these principles of recovery in a dance class, it gives me practice in applying them in all my affairs.

— Alison C., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous states: “We need daily opportunities to be of service to other compulsive overeaters, opportunities which the OA group provides” (p. 110).

Service, for me, is a most important part of this wonderful OA puzzle. Our program grows when we each give service. Thankfully, we have different talents (gifts); we are financial wizards or artists or orators. In my years in program, I have discovered I have many gifts that benefit OA. To share these gifts is not only my responsibility, it’s also my privilege.

My path in OA included service even before I walked into my first meeting. A relative handed me the pamphlet Fifteen Questions and invited me to go to a meeting. There, someone welcomed me and said, “Keep coming back.” Those small acts of service touched my heart and made me feel like I belonged. My first sponsor said, “You won’t keep it unless you give it away.” So I went to meetings early to set up and welcome newcomers.

Then my service opportunities expanded, and with each one came a feeling of belonging. At my first intergroup meeting I said, “I’m just going to listen,” but soon I was planning a workshop. It was such fun, and I rediscovered organizational skills that I enjoyed. An intergroup member encouraged me to attend region assembly, and we carried the message through a public information committee and convention planning. When I walked into my first World Service Business Conference, I was in awe of OA members who were passionate about service. I have that passion today, and I love to share it even after thirty-seven years of recovery.

I ask two things of my sponsees: be honest and do service. This is what I was taught, and sharing my gifts has given me a life second to none.

We can never know when a small act of service will touch the heart of another compulsive eater. Our pieces fit perfectly when each of us brings our unique way to serve, to be part of a whole, to belong.

— Barbara B., Cape Cod, Massachusetts
Lire and Learn—and Serve

If I accept the circumstances I am in, I am given the opportunity to learn and serve.

To learn and serve is the agreement I made when I entered the Twelve Step program: Accept—Learn—Serve.

When I came to understand I had a disorder that made me different from many other people, and when I came to accept I would have to accommodate this inherent weakness in my system for the rest of my life, then I could choose to follow a philosophy of life that rests on the commitment to learn and serve.

I cannot prescribe any other formula to guide my life. The only formula that will sustain me and my weakness in health and happiness is one of service. I cannot be profit-based. I cannot be ego-based. I cannot be talent-based. I can only be service-based. All other approaches will quickly come to a dead end.

Basing my choices on a foundation of learning and serving starts with a dependency on God and a faith and appreciation of all experiences, both painful and joyous, as the pathway to health and happiness. This is the agreement, the contract I made with OA when I first began the journey.

Accept—Learn—Serve. May I continue to live up to that commitment.

— Ron S.

2018 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 info@oa.org with subject “Lifeline.”

DEPARTMENTS:

• Bits and Bites: Add to our collection of short inspirational quotes and recovery wisdom.
• What Works for Me: How do you work your program, and what difference has it made?
• Step Study, Living Traditions, Service and Recovery, and The Spiritual Path: Share about the month’s Step or Tradition or send a story about service or connecting with your HP.
• Newcomers Corner: Newcomers, share your OA experiences and concerns.
• Share It (letters to the editor): Was a Lifeline issue or story special for you? Tell us!

What Works for Me

Better Now

I have changed my focus: I used to say to myself, when I was about to overeat, “This will add half a pound (.2 kg) to my weight.” That consequence was not effective in stopping me from overeating. It seemed too distant, too much like “I will deal with that later.” I’ve now identified something that is affected the moment I eat—my sense of shame.

Now, when I’m thinking of putting something inappropriate into my mouth, I ask, “Is this worth the damage to myself? Is this adding to my self-shaming? If I do this, the food will be bitten, chewed, and swallowed—but then what? How am I going to feel in five, ten, or fifteen minutes, after my binge is over?”

The answer for me is that I will feel worse about myself—immediately. Guilt and shame are more immediate and heavier now than the pounds I would gain eventually.

My HP is responsible for bringing this practice to me through my sponsor’s suggestions based on what works for her. Thank you, OA, for helping me feel better about myself now. It works for me—I find that shame is more toxic to my mood and spirit than food is helpful.

— Liz S., Portland, Oregon USA

Find resources and podcasts about working the OA program on the OA website at oa.org/members/working-the-program.

FEATURES: See pp. 22–23

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.

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 monthly 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.
2018 LIFE LINE TOPICS

JANUARY » Due: 9/15/17
My OA Birthday
January 20, 2018, marks the celebration of OA’s 58th birthday. Share a story about your OA birthday, how it was celebrated and its meaning for you.
How OA Changed My Life
Describe your life before and after being in OA, including your physical state. How is life better in recovery?

FEBRUARY » Due: 10/15/17
Unity Day
Unity Day is February 24, 2018 at 11:30 a.m. PST. Share your experience of OA unity, a Unity Day celebration, or Tradition One.

Lessons From Our Group Conscience
How has participating in a group conscience impacted your recovery? What makes a group conscience meeting successful? How have you worked to develop “substantial unanimity” as described in the Twelfth Concept of OA Service?

MARCH » Due: 11/15/17
I Am a Newcomer
Spread the word! We want to hear from newcomers! Sharing what you have found in OA is a service to the Fellowship.
Welcome Home
Tell us the story of your first meeting—how you came to OA and what you found.
Understanding Abstinence
Abstinence can be confusing to the newcomer. How did you come to understand your abstinence? What has abstinence in OA given you?

APRIL » Due: 12/15/17
#OArecovery
How do you use social media to support your recovery or carry the message? How have you kept to Tradition Eleven, OA’s Statement on Public Media Policy, and the Tool of anonymity when using social media? What is your message about social media, abstinence, and our primary purpose?

Coming in Young
OA members under 30, we need your story! How is your experience in recovery similar to or different from older OA members? How have you found ways to give service? What’s it like to be a young sponsor? What challenges to abstinence and recovery have you overcome? What have you gained by being in OA? How did you first hear the message, and how do you carry it to other young compulsive eaters? Include your age in your story.

Spotlight on Our Seventh Tradition
How do you practice the Seventh Tradition, and how has it influenced your recovery?

MAY/JUNE » Due: 1/15/18
Recovery and Relationships
How has recovery affected relationships with family, friends, or your spouse or partner? Did relationships end or improve? Were there struggles along the way? What practical changes in your relationships helped you keep your abstinence and maintain your recovery? How has practicing the Traditions helped?

SEXUALITY AND INTIMACY IN RECOVERY
How has physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery affected your sexuality and the role of intimacy in your life? Has recovery helped you overcome sexual abuse or find a new harmony with your sexual identity? What gifts has program given you in this area of your life?

JULY » Due: 3/15/18
Generally Speaking
Write on any topic you find meaningful.

Celebrating OA’s Freedoms
“The word ‘freedom’ appears so many times in our literature, I began to think about the freedoms I gained by working each of the Steps of Overeaters Anonymous” (Voices of Recovery, p. 205). What freedoms have you gained in OA?

AUGUST » Due: 4/15/18
Sponsorship Day
Sponsorship Day is the third Saturday this month (August 18). Share your appreciation for your sponsor or for the opportunity to give service as a sponsor.

Service: Inside and Out
How do you give service to the Fellowship? To the still-suffering compulsive overeater? How did you carry the message outside OA? Which came first for you, service or abstinence?

My Professional Community
How has your doctor, dietitian, or other provider supported your recovery? How has OA helped you succeed with your provider’s treatment plan? Read the Forewords and Appendices of Overeaters Anonymous, Third Edition, which are written by professionals who “get it.” What do their messages about our disease mean to you?

SEPTEMBER » Due: 5/15/18
Working the Program While Working Through Obstacles
Your OA fellows have so many questions! How do you focus on abstinence when the weight wasn’t coming off? When compulsive eating urges arise, what do you do instead? How did you find self-esteem? How have you gotten unstuck and moved your recovery forward? How have you kept your program fresh? How did you overcome burnout or rebellion? How did you give up judging other OA members who still suffer and become truly compassionate? Give service to your fellows by responding to these questions with your experience, strength, and hope, or write about how you overcame a low point or other obstacle.

OCTOBER » Due: 6/15/18
How I Found My Higher Power
How did you come to believe? How did you find the God of your understanding?

When OA is Your HP
Is OA, your sponsor, your group, or another aspect of program your Higher Power? If so, how have you worked the Steps and applied our literature? Share how your HP has served your recovery.

ATTENDANCE: PRAYER, MEDITATION, AND IMPROVING CONSCIOUS CONTACT
What is your method for practicing Step Eleven and what are the results? Explain how prayer and meditation have worked for you and what has been the key to seeing results? Have your prayers been answered in unexpected ways? Do you have a special place to pray or meditate? Send us a photo!

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER » Due: 7/15/18
International Day Experiencing Abstinence and Twelfth Step Within Day
IEA is November 17 and Twelfth Step Within Day is December 12. Write about attending a celebration of either day or reflect on what either day means to you.

STAYING ABSTINENT THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS
How have you stayed abstinent through the holidays? What tip, strategy, prayer, or Tool has helped you the most?

GRATITUDE AND BLESSINGS: GIVING THANKS
A little gratitude goes a long way in recovery. Share what you are most grateful and thankful for in your recovery.
How I Ask

The Seventh Step is one of the most important in my recovery. Every Step is crucial, of course, but Step Seven holds a special place in my heart. For me, it is the realization of a miracle.

I ask my HP, whom I call God, to remove my resentments, fears, drivenness, and obsession with control (or illusions of control), and he does for me what I cannot do for myself. I am not able to remove anything from myself. I cannot by myself become a better person—kinder, less self-seeking, less me-oriented—or get rid of my shortcomings, but "There is One who has all power—that One is God. May you find Him now!" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 59). By his grace alone, I have been found by him and can humbly ask him to remove my shortcomings.

How I ask is equally important. I cannot ask with the wrong motives, thinking I’m doing something great; I cannot ask so I can look down my nose at others who still suffer. Nor can I ask, as I used to do, to be able to eat however I want. I do not want to go one day without OA. I value my sanity, and I know recovery comes from my HP and the Fellowship.

My hope is more people discover OA, so I do my best to contribute at meetings and make annual donations. OA suggests we spend our money on our disease, so I want to share it with OA so others can recover. Money is much like recovery—we can’t spend it unless we also share it with others. For today, I am choosing to keep the flow of recovery moving on all levels!

What Price Freedom?

I remember my last binge very clearly. I called my local OA office that night, and I will never forget the woman I spoke to and how glad I was to speak to an actual person. A few days later, she took me to my first meeting.

Since that day (more than ten years ago), through the grace of God, OA, and the Twelve Steps, I haven’t had to turn to binging, purging, or starving. My life has gotten much bigger, and I am grateful. My life depends on working my program, so I do not want to go one day without OA.

Life is different now. Program requires me to open my heart and spirit to an entirely new way of living, and it’s beyond my wildest dreams. I no longer need to my hand nearly all the time)

- gum and mints (I needed these if I wasn’t drinking diet soda or eating)
- laxatives
- diet pills
- workout equipment, gym memberships, and personal training sessions (which I had to cancel because I was too sick from bingeing)
- health care (I ended up in the emergency room because of bingeing and purging)
- clothes in several sizes
New Resonance
When I first came to OA, I was aware the Twelve Steps required belief in a Higher Power, but I felt spiritually broken after a traumatizing event with my church. I wanted nothing to do with religion or God. Still, I was desperate for hope and help with my compulsive overeating, so I went to meetings and tried to keep an open mind. Every time I heard “God” and “Lord” I cringed, and I didn’t know how to get past it. Turns out I was in exactly the right place.

A sponsor suggested I create new meanings for God and Lord. I spent hours contemplating and soul-searching and came up with “Giver Of Direction” and “Loving energy Orchestrating my Recovery Daily.” “He” became “Higher Energy.” I have a more personal and clear picture of God now—even beyond the acronyms—yet it seems to change daily. It’s like any good relationship: when you sit down and talk and listen, you learn new things. I’m sure my definition of HP will evolve as our relationship evolves.

For now, I’ve printed out a new definition of God. I read it daily, and it reinvigorates my new spirituality, leaving the pain of past religious experiences far behind. I know I am on a healing path.

HP, you are a flow of powerful and loving energy that desires connection with my heart, soul, body, and mind, and you are already connected to everyone and everything in the universe. You are a guiding force quietly and constantly orchestrating people, events, and circumstances for my greatest good, joy, happiness, and fulfillment. You are never late, never early. You are always compassionate and kind. You are my most trusted teacher, counselor, mentor, and friend; a source of strength, understanding, serenity, peace, and beauty. You want all the good things I want—for myself, for animals, and for the world—even more than I could ever imagine. There are no requirements with you, only sincere willingness to seek and trust. You are a perfect listener with excellent communication skills. I recognize you in the cool breeze, the warm sun on my face, the sand under my feet, the rain, the clouds, the trees. You are everywhere I go. You are a quiet, steady, strong force in my life that provides comfort, quiet, and calm in the midst of overwhelming thoughts and circumstances. You are my partner and companion, and together we create a positive force for good in the world.

— Stephanie J., Orlando, Florida, USA

Checking the List
What would have happened if a certain OA member had not attended my first meeting? I was full of questions and unsure if OA was for me. No one but that woman came, so the whole meeting was for me. During my five years in OA, I have kept coming back because being there for one person could be the difference between life in OA or death outside.

But that idea became an “ought” or a “should” for me. As I grew in recovery, I realized I needed to trust the God of my understanding. I could not keep OA going, only God could. If I could not be there, OA would continue. Thankfully, I am learning freedom from my obsession with being right or seen to be right (self-centered and self-righteous behaviors).

God has challenged me to use the gift of writing, but I have procrastinated for more than a year. Cleaning, gardening, visiting, computer problems, and my spouse were my excuses. Then I read “Off the List” (January 2017, pp. 26–27). It made me laugh out loud! I also write lists and have written down what I have already done to tick it off. Thank you, Lifeline.

I just turned 70. Today is the only day I have. Regrets about the past have been dealt with. I do not fear the future, because it’s in God’s hands. Challenges face me, but with God and OA, I look forward to aging with grace and acceptance of myself and others. If I was on my own, it couldn’t have happened.

— Elaine, New Zealand

Me Too
I want to thank the author of “Out of My Closet” (March 2017, pp. 4–5) for sharing. Many members in our meeting can relate, and it really hits a nerve for me.

I also read my daily meditations and get tearful, at times, without fully understanding why. I too was raised to be a member of the Clean Plate Club. I also received mixed messages. Before my mom passed, I was able to be strong enough to ask her why she’d say, “You need to lose weight,” but then later say, “Eat this so it won’t go to waste.” (Her response was that it’s a mother’s prerogative.) I relate to “through those years, food was my soulmate—it filled me up in ways no human being could.” I never heard it shared that way, but ditto for me too.

Lifeline validates my experience. It helps to know I am not alone.

— V.L.J., Traverse City, Michigan USA
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Read Lifeline Online! Register at oalifeline.org and read every story found in the print magazine, plus get access to all Lifeline stories published since January 2016!
Have you been worried about the way you eat? Do you resolve to go on a diet tomorrow, only to fail again and again? Is your weight affecting the way you live your life? If you are struggling, you are not alone anymore.

We are men and women—obese, anorexic, bulimic, or of a normal weight—from around the world who are recovering from compulsive eating. Our food behaviors include: obsession with body weight, size, and shape; eating binges; grazing; preoccupation with weight-reduction diets; starving; inducing vomiting after eating; constant preoccupation with food; inability to stop eating after taking the first bite; and overexercising. Our symptoms may vary, but we share a common bond: We are powerless over food and our lives are unmanageable.

Typically, we have tried numerous solutions to our problems with food, including years of diets or exercise. In our Fellowship, we have finally found a solution. Many of us have maintained a normal weight and found freedom from compulsive eating for many years. Physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery is offered through attending meetings, practicing a Twelve Step program, and helping others.

If you feel you are one of us, we welcome you with open arms.