

More self-examination revealed many areas in which our lives were out of balance. We had to admit that we had not acted sanely when we responded to our children's needs for attention by yelling at them, or when we were jealously possessive of our mates. Too much of the time we had lived in fear and anxiety. More comfortable with food than with people, we sometimes limited our social lives. We closed the curtains, stopped answering the phone, and hid in the house.

When we were around other people, we smiled and agreed when we really wanted to say no. Some of us were unable to stand up for ourselves in abusive relationships; we felt we deserved the abuse. Or, we focused on others' faults and thought for hours about what they should do to solve their problems, while our own problems went unsolved.

Compulsive eaters are often people of extremes. We overreacted to slight provocations while ignoring the real issues in our lives. We were obsessively busy, then we were exhausted and unable to act. We were wildly excited then deeply depressed. We saw the whole world in black and white. If we couldn't have it all, we didn't want any; if we couldn't be the best, we didn't want to participate.

Little by little, we saw how much pain our way of living was causing us. Gradually, we came to believe we needed to change.

THERE IS HELP

If you can identify with the description in this pamphlet, we will welcome you. If you know of someone who might benefit from this program, suggest that they contact Overeaters Anonymous.

HOW TO FIND OA

Visit the OA website at www.oa.org, or contact the World Service Office at 1-505-891-2664. Many directories also include local listings for Overeaters Anonymous.

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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INTRODUCING OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS

COMPULSIVE OVEREATING— AN INSIDE VIEW

*The various manifestations
of compulsive overeating*

You are not alone.
Overeaters Anonymous can help.

No dues. No fees. No weigh-ins.



INTRODUCTION

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

AN INSIDE VIEW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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