

## OUR INVITATION TO YOU

We of Overeaters Anonymous have made a discovery. At the very first meeting we attended, we learned that we were in the clutches of a dangerous illness, and that will power, emotional health and self-confidence, which some of us had once possessed, were no defense against it.

To be sure, the picture painted of the disease was grim: progressive, debilitating, incurable. Compulsive overeating has many symptoms in addition to mere fat. It is also an illness which isolates and gradually, or rapidly, causes increasingly serious problems in one or more areas of our lives: health, job, finances, family or social life.

We have learned that the reasons are unimportant. What deserves the attention of the still-suffering compulsive overeater is this: *there is a proven, workable method by which we can arrest our illness.*

The OA recovery program is patterned after that of Alcoholics Anonymous. We use AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, changing only the words "alcohol" and "alcoholic" to "food" and "compulsive overeater".

As our personal stories attest, the Twelve-Step program of recovery works as well for compulsive overeaters as it does for alcoholics.

Can we guarantee you this recovery? The answer is simple. If you will honestly face the truth about yourself and the illness; if you will keep coming back to meetings to talk and listen to other recovering compulsive overeaters; if you will read our literature and that of Alcoholics Anonymous with an open mind; and, most important, if you are willing to rely on a power greater than yourself for direction in your life, and to take the Twelve Steps to the best of your ability, we believe you can indeed join the ranks of those who recover.

The disease of compulsive overeating causes or contributes to illness on three levels – emotional, physical, and spiritual. To remedy this threefold illness we offer several suggestions, but keep in mind that the basis of the program is spiritual, as evidenced by the Twelve Steps.

We are not a "diet and calories" club. We practice abstinence by staying away from eating between planned meals and from all individual binge foods. Once we become abstinent, the preoccupation with food diminishes and in many cases leaves us entirely. We then find that, to deal with our inner turmoil, we have to have a new way of thinking, of acting on life rather than reacting to it-in essence, a new way of living.

From this vantage point, we begin the Twelve-Step program of recovery, moving beyond the food and the emotional havoc to a fuller living experience.

We believe that no amount of will power or self-determination could have saved us. Times without number, our resolutions and plans were shattered as we saw our individual resources fail.

So we honestly admitted that we were powerless over food. This was the first step toward recovery. It followed that, if we had no power of our own, we needed a power outside ourselves to recover.

Some of us, including agnostics and atheists, regard the group itself as a power greater than ourselves. Others choose to accept different interpretations of this power. But most of us adopt the concept of God as God may be understood by each individual.

As a result of practicing the Steps, the symptom of compulsive overeating is removed on a daily basis. Thus, for most of us, abstinence means freedom from bondage of compulsive overeating, achieved through the process of surrendering to something greater than ourselves; the more total our surrender, the more fully realized our freedom from food obsession.

Here are the Steps as adapted for Overeaters Anonymous:

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.

“How can I face this?” you may ask. We suggest you do so only one day at a time. “Just for today” is one of many deeply meaningful slogans. “I can do anything for twenty-four hours that I couldn’t do for a lifetime” was a brand new way of thinking for us. Before, we looked at our weight problem-and all our other problems-and said, “What’s the use? It’s too much for me. I can’t possibly do it.”

Now, we fully accept and live by the premise that we don’t have to look at everything all at once. We know that it’s necessary to do a certain amount of planning but, once having planned, we act for this one day alone.

“But I’m too weak. I’ll never make it!” Don’t worry; we have all thought and said the same thing. The amazing secret to the success of this program is just that: weakness. It is weakness, not strength, that binds us to each other and to a higher power and somehow gives us an ability to do what we cannot do alone. We have discovered that if people in this program love us, it is not for our strength, but for our weakness and our willingness to share that with others.

After attending a few meetings, you may proclaim, “I’m not *that* bad!” Once again, we ask you to keep in mind that compulsive overeating is a progressive illness. If you really are a compulsive overeater, the symptoms will grow worse. Within our ranks are those who were recovering but tried

once again to control food by their own devices, with consequent return to serious overeating and, in many cases, massive weight gain.

If you can identify with the developing pattern of overeating shared here, you probably are a compulsive overeater. The chances are that your symptoms will eventually reach those of late-stage compulsive overeating. In other words, you're not that bad-YET!

If you decide you are one of us, we welcome you with open arms. You are not alone any more! Overeaters Anonymous extends to all a gift of acceptance. No matter who you are, where you come from or where you are going, you are welcome here. Regardless of what you have done or failed to do, what you have felt or haven't felt, who you have loved or hated, you may be sure of our unconditional acceptance.

We will help you and rejoice with you and tell you that we are not failures just because we sometimes fail. We'll hold out our arms in love and stand beside you as you pull yourself back up and walk on again to where you are heading.

Sometimes we fail to be all that we could be, and sometimes we aren't there to give you what you need from us. Accept our imperfections, too. Love and help us in return. That is what we are in OA-imperfect but progressing. Let us rejoice together in our recovery and in the assurance that we have a home, if we want it.

Welcome to Overeaters Anonymous. Welcome home.

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