oa.org | info@oa.org | +1 505.891.2664

About OA

The first Overeaters Anonymous meeting was held in 1960 in Los Angeles USA. Since then, OA has grown to offer more than 6,000 meetings worldwide, spanning about 75 countries and 40 languages. 3,500 OA meetings are accessible online and by phone.

OA offers peer support, inspiring and instructional literature and materials, and a Twelve Step program of recovery to anyone who has a problem with food, including those suffering from anorexia, binge eating, bulimia, food addiction, overexercising (exercise bulimia), and compulsive overeating, as well as anyone who has had weight-loss surgery. Patterned after the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, the OA program offers physical, emotional and spiritual recovery to all who suffer from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors. OA's most recent member survey shows at least eight in ten OA members report improvements with their weight, emotional health, relationships, spiritual connection and daily functioning. Members who find recovery through OA's Twelve Steps report that their desire to eat compulsively is removed.

OA maintains a "Unity with Diversity" policy: we are united in working a Twelve Step program to find lifelong recovery from our compulsive food behaviors, and we recognize and embrace the multifaceted diversity of our members. In OA, you'll find members who are severely obese, obese, overweight, at a healthy weight, or underweight. Some members are still struggling, some have made significant progress, and others have been living free from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors for many years. All are welcome—the only requirement for membership in OA is the desire to stop eating compulsively.

No dues or fees are required for participation in OA. The organization is self-supporting through members' voluntary contributions.

As a matter of policy, OA is not affiliated with any public or private organization, political movement, ideology or religious doctrine and takes no position on issues outside of its own program.

Similar to other Twelve Step programs, a key tenet of OA is anonymity, which offers members freedom of expression, equality, and safeguards within the OA community. Anonymity at the level of press, radio, television, and other public media provides assurance that OA membership is not disclosed and no identifiable OA member is attributed as a spokesperson for OA. This protects both the individual and OA as a whole.

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Problem Food Behaviors

OA members experience many different types of problem food behaviors. These "symptoms" are as varied as our membership:

- Eating when not hungry
- Not eating when their body needs nourishment
- Going on eating binges for no apparent reason
- Eating until stuffed or feeling sick
- Eating sensibly in front of others and then "making up for it" when alone
- Eating in ways that adversely affect their health or lifestyle
- Reaching for food during times of emotional intensity, whether positive or negative
- Exhibiting eating behaviors that make themselves or others unhappy
- Using laxatives, vomiting, diuretics, excessive exercise, diet pills, shots, or other medical interventions (including surgery) to control weight
- Fasting or severely restricting food intake to control weight
- Fantasizing about how much better their life would be at a different size or weight
- Needing to chew or have something in their mouth all times, whether it is food, gum, mints, candies, or beverages
- Eating food that is burned, frozen, or spoiled; from containers in the grocery store; or out of the garbage
- Being unable to stop eating certain foods after having the first bite
- Having lost weight with a diet or "period of control" followed by bouts of uncontrolled eating and/or weight gain
- Spending too much time thinking about food and weight, arguing with themselves about whether or what to eat, planning the next diet or exercise cure, or counting calories

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Questions & Answers

WHAT DOES OA OFFER?

We offer unconditional acceptance, ongoing and readily available support, and a program that brings about physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors. We in OA believe we have a threefold illness—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Tens of thousands have found that OA's Twelve Step program effects recovery on all three levels. The Twelve Steps embody a set of principles that, when followed, promote inner change. Sponsors help us understand and apply these principles. As old attitudes are discarded, we often find there is no longer a need to engage in compulsive eating or compulsive food behaviors.

Those of us who choose to recover one day at a time practice the Twelve Steps. In so doing, we achieve a new way of life and lasting freedom from food obsession.

HOW DOES AN INDIVIDUAL JOIN OA?

No one "joins" OA in the usual sense of the word. There are no dues to pay or membership applications to be completed. Any person who believes they may have problem with food is welcome in OA and at any of our online, telephone, or face-to-face meetings. Anyone who says they are a member of OA is a member.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR OA MEMBERSHIP?

Our Third Tradition states, "The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively."

HOW MUCH DOES OA MEMBERSHIP COST?

There is no financial requirement to be a member of OA. Our recovery program is available to all who want to stop eating compulsively, no matter their ability to pay. We maintain a tradition of self-support through members' voluntary contributions, so we "pass the hat" at OA meetings and events.

IS OA A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION?

No. OA is not a religious organization and requires no religious belief as a condition of membership. OA has among its membership people of many religious faiths as well as atheists and agnostics. OA is, however, a spiritual program based on each members' personal interpretation of their higher power.

HOW DO OA MEMBERS ACHIEVE AND MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT?

The concept of abstinence from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors is a foundation of OA's program of recovery. We admit our inability to control compulsive eating and behaviors and abandon the idea that all we need to be able to eat normally is "a little willpower." By working the Twelve Steps of OA, it becomes possible to refrain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight—one day at a time. OA offers the newcomer support in dealing with the physical, emotional, and spiritual symptoms of compulsive eating. Members follow a personal food plan, which they are encouraged to create with the support of their health care professional and OA sponsor.

While a diet can help us achieve a healthy weight, it cannot address food compulsions, such as obsessive thoughts, cravings, and behaviors. OA provides guidance in creating a more comprehensive plan of eating that may include identifying trigger foods and behaviors; working with both an OA sponsor and a licensed health care professional to adopt a food plan; and continually monitoring the outcomes of that plan to gauge success and make needed adjustments.

OA does not furnish or endorse diets, counseling services, hospitalization, or treatment; nor does OA participate in or conduct research and training in the field of eating disorders. OA members interested in learning about nutrition or who seek professional advice are encouraged to consult qualified professionals. We may freely use such help, with the assurance that OA supports each of us in our efforts to recover.

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Twelve Steps

ABOUT THE TWELVE STEPS

Working OA's Twelve Steps is the heart of the OA member's recovery program. They offer a new way of life that enables the compulsive eater to live without the need to engage in compulsive eating or compulsive food behaviors.

The Twelve Steps and the ideas they express about addiction and compulsion reflect the practical experience and application of spiritual insights recorded by thinkers throughout the ages. The Twelve Steps enable compulsive eaters and millions of others to lead happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which OA is built.

The Twelve Steps of 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.

Permission to use the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services, Inc.

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Member Anonymity & the News Media

As an organization, OA is not anonymous; however, the personal anonymity of our members is one of our highest priorities. Our Eleventh Tradition states, "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."

Media professionals have always been cooperative partners in helping members of Twelve Step fellowships preserve their personal anonymity. Please do not personally identify OA members in your articles and interviews. We ask that when covering OA, you use only first names or pseudonyms (indicated as such) of OA members and that you obscure the faces of those who identify themselves as OA members in on-camera interviews and photographs. In addition, when referencing OA members, we ask that you refer to them as members or by their service title (e.g., trustee) but not as spokespersons for OA.

Members of the media are cordially invited to observe any OA meeting that is designated "Meeting with Visitors (Open)." "Meeting without Visitors (Closed)" indicates a meeting that is for OA members only. To verify a meeting's open or closed status, contact OA or visit oa.org/find-a-meeting.

Protecting Anonymity in Print Formats

If your paper or magazine is doing a story on an OA meeting, all group members should be asked in advance if they wish to participate. Backs, hands, and feet may be photographed (with permission).

Protecting Anonymity in Audio Formats

For obvious reasons, shielding a member's anonymity is simpler when there are no visuals; the member simply doesn't reveal their last name, or uses a pseudonym.

Protecting Anonymity in Video Formats

Methods to protect a member's anonymity are as follows: shadow; silhouette; graphic scramble/mosaic wipe; out of focus/side angle; shooting hands, backs, and feet; forced perspective; and vocal distortion.

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Speakers & Topics

Overeaters Anonymous professional staff and volunteer members from around the world are available to discuss the program and/or personal stories of recovery and can provide a national or local perspective, depending on your story needs. As with all Twelve Step programs, OA has no opinions about issues beyond our program (what we deem outside issues), including medically recommended methods for weight loss. OA members can speak in specifics about their own experience and more generally about what the compulsive eater and those with compulsive food behaviors may experience before and after they find OA.

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