

ABSTINENCE WORKSHOP

Defining your Abstinence and Food Plan

Purposes

- 1) To give O.A.s an opportunity to learn about abstinence from other O.A.s who are comfortable living life abstaining from overeating.
- 2) To use conference-approved literature to show that abstinence is an important aspect of O.A. recovery.
- 3) To give O.A.s the experience of developing their own food plans based on four factors:
 - a. consideration of their compulsive/ troublesome foods,
 - b. consideration of behaviors and situations that trigger their compulsive overeating,
 - c. consideration of what makes a food plan sustainable, i.e., how it meets an OA's individual needs and lifestyle; and,
 - d. consideration of what kind of food plan each O.A. is willing to follow to achieve abstinence.

Agenda

- 1:00 – 1:15 pm Introduction, Reading of OA Preamble
Facilitator qualifies, referencing Introduction to OA
Discussion of handouts and workshop format
- 1:15 – 1:45 pm First speaker discusses abstinence and her definition of abstinence using excerpts from **Big Book** or **OA 12 & 12** and leads group in discussion of abstinence.
- 1:45 – 2:30 pm Second speaker discusses compulsive eating behaviors using excerpts from the **Big Book** or **OA 12 & 12** and leads group in completion of Handout #1 with discussion of compulsive foods to follow. The speakers then discuss behaviors and triggers that contribute to overeating, leading the group through completion of Handout #2 with a discussion of behaviors and situations to follow.
- 2:30 – 2:45 pm Break
- 2:45 – 4:00 pm First and second speaker discuss their own food plans and why they think those plans worked for them, how strongly they adhere to the plans, whether the plans have changed, etc. They lead the group in completion of Handout #3 with with discussion of willingness to use the tool of a food plan to follow.
- 4:00 pm Close with I Put My Hand in Yours

ABSTINENCE WORKSHOP

Defining your Abstinence and Plan of Eating

Abstinence: Overeaters Anonymous' primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive overeating and to carry this message of recovery to those who still suffer¹. Abstinence is a firm commitment to this primary purpose. As we cannot give away what we do not have, individuals need to sustain abstinence to carry out OA's primary purpose.

Webster's Dictionary defines abstinence as: *n.* an abstaining from some or all food, liquor, etc.

In May of 1995 at the OA World Service Business Conference, abstinence was elevated to "Our Primary Purpose" (along with carrying this message of recovery to those who still suffer). In a letter addressed to meeting secretaries, June 9, 1995, a delegate from the San Fernando Valley Intergroup stated "Abstinence is for the compulsive overeater what sobriety is for the alcoholic. Abstinence is the goal of the program, not a tool." She quoted the OA preamble which states that the primary purpose of Overeaters Anonymous is "... to abstain from compulsive overeating ..."

The point of this workshop is to give you an understanding of plans of eating, one of the eight tools of OA recovery. By the end of the day you should understand the basics of creating workable plans of eating. As you will see, it's important to select an abstinence that works for you, an abstinence that you can sustain throughout your life, with all life's challenges, until the day you die. It is essential to make any plan of eating livable, attainable and sustainable, i.e., something you are able to commit to now. We encourage you throughout the next couple of hours to share your comments, questions and concerns, but sharing your writings or thoughts is entirely optional. We strongly suggest that you discuss the lists and plans that you develop during this workshop with your sponsor.

What makes a plan of eating essential in OA recovery is that compulsive eaters have distorted perceptions of food and eating. What is the purpose of eating? How did this purpose change from a basic need for nutrition to a need to engage in destructive eating behaviors?

What are real world situations that can hamper abstinence? Just a few of the common situations are medical conditions that require special diets, lack of knowledge about nutrition, work schedules, life schedules, family's and friend's life schedules, willingness to plan meals, reliance on others for meals, and travel. It's important to note that all of these issues have been overcome by O.A.s who have achieved long-term abstinence.

¹ From OA Preamble, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous

My abstinence date began on: _____ (date)

My abstinence (commitment to my plan of eating) is:

Handout #1

Compulsive Foods: Foods that make me ... crazy! "Fix me! Fill me!"

Webster's Dictionary defines compulsive as: *adj.* obsessive, neurotic, habitual, irrational and uncontrollable.

This exercise is just an honest appraisal of your trigger foods. Foods that lead you to "pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization." Quoted from page 30 of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous: "All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals—usually brief — were followed by still less control, which lead in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced to a man that alcoholics of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better."

Identify and list all the foods that you are not willing to give up or modify yet or are not sure lead to compulsive overeating. You will have ten minutes to complete this section. We encourage you to share with the group your comments, questions and concerns during this workshop, but sharing is optional. You will not be called on to share your writings or thoughts. However, we strongly suggest that you discuss these lists with your sponsor.

Foods **I am not sure** I can eat
moderately

Foods **I know** I **cannot** eat
moderately

Foods **I can** eat moderately

As you grow and change in abstinence, work the 12 steps, 12 traditions and the eight tools of recovery, you will find that a change will begin to take place with your relationship to your compulsive foods. When this growth begins, discuss with your sponsor whether it is appropriate to make these food changes part of your abstinence or food plan. You will begin to live in the 9th and 10th Step promises. You will recoil from excess food "as from a hot flame."

Handout #2

Compulsive Behaviors and Triggers: Behaviors and situations that make me reach for the food!

Webster's Dictionary defines a trigger as: *n.* an event that precipitates other events.

What situations and behaviors have resulted in your eating compulsively? This exercise is an honest look at those triggers that have caused us to eat compulsively. There is a saying in 12th step recovery that those who fail to plan, plan to fail. This has been true for many OAs. Because food is such an essential factor in life, and because the ways that we use food to deal with life are so "hard-wired" into our beings, we have found that a plan of eating needs to consider those situations and behaviors that trigger our compulsive overeating.

Identify and list all the people, places and things, and the ways that you react to them, that result in your eating compulsively. You will have ten minutes to complete this section. We encourage you to share with the group your comments, questions and concerns during this workshop, but sharing is optional. You will not be called on to share your writings or thoughts. However, we strongly suggest that you discuss these lists with your sponsor.

Situations that trigger my compulsive overeating

Behaviors that result in my compulsive overeating

We have found that as we work the steps and grow in abstinence these situations and behaviors are less threatening to our abstinence. We acquire new ways of coping with difficulties and no longer feel compelled to eat compulsively.

Handout # 3

THE FOOD PLAN: A plan of eating is a powerful tool that will aid you in attaining your goal of sustaining abstinence for life. The food plan is ever changing.

Webster's Dictionary defines refrain as: *v.* to hold back, keep oneself from doing something.

Webster's Dictionary defines moderately as: *adj.* 1. within reasonable limits; avoiding extremes. 2. mild; calm 3. of medium quality, amount, etc., to make or become moderate. Avoidance of extremes.

Quoted from the letter addressed to meeting secretaries June 9, 1995, "A plan of eating is a tool. It is an aid in achieving our goal. Ultimately, in OA we determine our own plan of eating." (It is the first of the eight tools.) "Overeaters Anonymous does not endorse any specific plan of eating. Some members refrain from certain foods, some eat all foods more moderately. Only you, with proper guidance, can honestly appraise your own eating habits." Slips happen in the food plan, never in abstinence. Our food plan is imperfect.

Select a food plan that works for you. You have already listed the foods, behaviors and situations that keep you eating compulsively, anorexic, or bulimic. Choose a food plan that allows you to eat in moderation. Choose an approach to your triggers that allows you to participate in life without setting off your illness.

You will have ten minutes to complete this section. We encourage you to share your comments, questions and concerns during this workshop, but you will not be called on to share your writings or thoughts. We strongly suggest that you discuss these lists with your sponsor.

My food plan is:

Morning	Afternoon	Evening

The Tenth Step Promises

pages 84-85 of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone — even food. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in food. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward food has been given to us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality — safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do for food is a subtle foe. We are not cured of compulsive overeating. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. "How can I best serve Thee — Thy will (not mine) be done." These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will.