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Serenity Times

Westchester United Intergroup
www.oawestchesterny.org

Food neutrality has been hard for me. I can't really say the obsession has been lifted, even though I'm abstinent. But I can say the obsession has been reduced.

When I was in the food, I thought about food all the time: the imagined pleasures of my binge foods; fantasies of trips to restaurants; and plans for my next meal (and the meal after that).

Now, after working the Steps with a sponsor, finding a Plan of Eating that supports my recovery, and weighing and measuring my food, I'm "more" neutral. Food is more like fuel than a friend. I eat to live; I don't live to eat. My meals are for nourishment, not entertainment.

Still, the obsession does resurface sometimes. If I find myself licking clean my spoon, slurping the last drop from my bowl, or counting down the minutes until my next meal, it's a sign that my disease is alive and well.

Other times, the obsession is more subtle, operating below the surface: a glance of disgust (or envy) at a family member's meal; going into the depths of despair when I overcook something in the toaster oven; or making a change to my Plan of Eating without running it by my sponsor or nutritionist.

Will I ever be completely free from food obsession? Will I ever experience total food neutrality? I don't know.

For me, this Program is about progress, not perfection. I'll always be a compulsive eater for as long as I live. But I'm grateful for the progress that Higher Power has granted me.

Michael P.

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- About meetings: www.oawestchesterny.org/meetings.html
- 7th Tradition: www.oawestchesterny.org/7th-step-tradition.html
- Contact WUIG: www.oawestchesterny.org/contact.html
- Overeaters Anonymous: www.oa.org



When I first read page 85 of the Big Book, I was filled with hope. The promise that I would "seldom be interested" in excess food; that I would be able to look at my binge food and "recoil from it as from a hot flame"; and that I would be placed in a "position of neutrality – safe and protected" gave me hope that I, too, could recover. And then the reality check: "That is how we react as long as we keep in fit spiritual condition." The chapter of Into Action goes on to say that I can't afford to rest on my laurels because "alcohol is a subtle foe". I needed to accept that I will never be "cured" of the disease of compulsive eating, but if I work the program as hard today as I did when I first got abstinent, there is hope that I can live in a place of food neutrality for these next 24 hours. Years ago my sponsor told me that I was a pickle. She said that I may have been a cucumber at one point in time, but something changed in me and now I was a pickle, and that a pickle can never go back to being a cucumber – once a pickle, always a pickle. I thought she was a little loopy at the time, but have since learned the wisdom behind the statement.

I first entered the rooms in April of 1998. Although my time on the pink cloud allowed me to release 60 pounds almost immediately, it wasn't until I started working the steps and using all the tools that I was able to hold on to my abstinence. For the last 28 years, I have attended 3 meetings a week; I have a sponsor, and I sponsor others; I have worked the steps in many different ways and currently live in 10, 11 & 12. I reach out to my fellows by phone or text every day – not just when I am in trouble, but all the time to maintain the connections that keep me sane & sober.

My disease has installed a built-in forgetter in my brain. It tells me all kinds of lies: that I can have "just one", and I can taste all the party food like the skinny people at the party; it tells me that I can skip a meeting if I am too busy, and that it's ok to not make my program calls for a few days. The problem with believing the lies is that I lose that position of neutrality. Maybe not on the first day of slipping and sliding, but definitely within a week. In the HOW rooms, I was told, "It's not the extra green bean that's the problem, but the decision to have it." When I think I can "get away with" sneaking a little extra without telling anyone, I've decided to defy my Higher Power. Once the connection is severed, it becomes much harder to regain that feeling of food neutrality.

I was told that working my program is like walking up a down escalator, and as soon as I stop and rest, I will be dragged down. I was also told that it's easier to maintain my recovery than to get it back once I've lost it. I know this to be true. I have not had anything close to a perfect recovery, but my lapses have been few and far between. My family was always the first to notice my change in behavior when I strayed from the path – they would say, "Mom, I think you need a meeting," and they were always right. I treasure this precious gift, so I need to be willing to do the work to keep it.

Andrea R

If you are in food neutrality, that is NOT standing still...

When I came to OA at 28 years old, I was out-eating my 6-foot, semi-pro soccer-playing husband, but because my 'job' entailed 5 hours of exercise each day, my compulsive eating didn't 'show.' That's a great formula for denial. And denial is not food neutrality. It is lack of awareness and a diversionary tactic, at least in my life.

I was stunned to hear the leader share at my first OA meeting that he was no longer throwing a nightly party with himself, a brand-name baked good, and Mary Tyler Moore, a TV show featuring an actress by that name. He got my attention. His was a love affair with food. I wasn't sure my situation was exactly that. Still....

My mother had been on my case from the time I was 13, warning me I was going to gain weight. That did not prevent me from bingeing and starving. Instead, my compulsive eating pattern began then and there, and also provoked another serious disorder: a physically damaging, negative body image.

It was a long haul to release my diet mindset and to lean into the notion that abstinence from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors is its own reward. I didn't achieve abstinence because of a specific food plan but from the example shown to me by people who exhibited freedom from food obsession. What I saw...not being ordered around by my compulsion to eat, that approximates food neutrality. But it's not everything.
At the time I was verging on abstinence, there was a pronounced bias in OA AGAINST people who were not on one of the then suggested food plans (i.e., 'Gray sheet,' 'Blue sheet,' Orange sheet'. I had been given a plan from a nutritionist which, when I embarked upon it, represented a complete shift from my diet head. I needed a lot of encouragement, and fortunately, a meeting sprang up with others who were recovering the way I was: working the 12 steps plus eating according to a doctor-recommended food plan. That meeting riveted me to OA, where I have been for 51 years, no kiddin'!

Food neutrality came from working with sponsors on the steps and staying on my eating program. Many times, I would have to ask myself, "Can I eat this food safely WITHOUT going into the lion's den and risking disappearing into the binge-fast cycle again? Do I even know the answer to that?" In my experience, I am always learning the answers to these two questions, one situation at a time. And it often requires looking at the situation through someone else's eyes.

If you are in food neutrality, that is NOT standing still... (Continued)

In early recovery, I thought food neutrality was me lying on the kitchen floor overnight, next to the fridge, in order to prevent my spouse from eating my abstinent food. Now food neutrality is being able to open the refrigerator door without feeling like I'm pulling the pin on a hand grenade when finding my husband's stash of non-abstinent foods. Beyond not being triggered, food neutrality lets me put the stash out of my mind entirely.

How I arrived at this place is a story worth telling. After a couple of years of night eating, despite all my good actions and intentions, I heard a long-time abstinent fellow tell someone else to put his Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book in his refrigerator. When I awoke at 2 in the morning the next day, went zombie-like to the 'fridge and opened the door, I yelled! That fat blue hardcover program "bible" was front and center and scared the living daylights out of me. Then I really woke up.

My Big Book no longer lives in the 'fridge and hasn't for quite some time. The memory is still vivid, palpable even, of both my willingness to take two suggestions – 1. Placing the book on the top shelf of the refrigerator and then 2. waking up to the question, "What are you willing to do that you haven't done before to get abstinent and stay abstinent?"

After several decades in OA recovery, I recognized one final guerrilla tactic my disease practiced that still compromised my peace of mind and stood as a barrier to long-lasting food neutrality. Negative body image. So, I started a women's meeting focused on overcoming negative body image. 35 people came to the first meeting. The group lasted 12 years and touched hundreds of women's lives. Before we put it to rest post-COVID, it had spawned dozens of body image-focused OA groups across the US. Combined with abstinence, the absence of disheartening body image messaging makes for the best relationship with food I've ever had. I don't have to avoid cameras, mirrors, getting weighed at the doctor's office, and many, many other situations where my negative mantras would be in my head: "You're not thin enough," "Pretty enough," "You don't deserve (FILL IN THE BLANK)." I no longer confuse food with having a best friend; it is not a lover, a lawyer, a prison, or a prison guard. It is the capacity to have HP-powered resilience to the bombardment of 'eat me" messages that come my way daily.

Meryl M.

Neutrality - what it means to me and how it helps my program

Neutrality in recovery means moving away from intense emotional extremes—such as hatred, obsession, or forced positivity—toward a calm, functional acceptance of yourself and your past. This phrase reminds me that my program is about progress, not perfection. I am moving away from ... and towards ... – it does not discount that there will at times be intense emotions; this is still life on life's terms. But with the tools of the program, over time, I can begin to process these emotions. I can neutralize their impact on my life and my program and achieve a level of self-acceptance. When I was in the food, intense emotions were the #1 thing I ate over. I wanted to numb those feelings, because I did not have the capability to process them in a healthy way. By numbing uncomfortable emotions with food, I also had no happy emotions. I was missing out on the joy in my life and the wonderful gifts that have always been there for me. With joy there is sadness – but I don't need to turn to food anymore – I have a higher power, the steps, and the fellowship to help me.

Body neutrality allows me to exist without evaluating my appearance; instead of judging how my body looks, I focus on what it allows me to do (like walking, hugging a loved one, or resting). I have just begun to work the steps as they relate to body image. My disease has reared its ugly head around this issue and is tormenting me with the old, negative soundtracks of shame. I am learning to say thank you for all that my body still does, despite the damage I did with food. Those recurring negative thoughts no longer serve a purpose for me. I can acknowledge them without giving in, without turning to food for comfort.

Lastly, letting go of the need to control every outcome (often framed as "shifting into spiritual neutral") stops me from outsmarting myself and slipping back into destructive loops. My unhealthy relationship with food began at a very young age when I had little control over the environment around me. I now understand that it is God's will, not mine, that will lead me to the next right thing. I definitely preferred situations where I had the illusion of control. Program is teaching me to trust in my higher power. In the early years, when I lacked control, I also lost trust and faith. My life is more peaceful and productive when I follow God's will for me and live in trust and faith. This is absolutely a work in progress. But the program works when I work it.

Mary S.

Dear God,

I cannot thank you enough for the gifts that you have given me. OA has given me [a new] access to You.

Recently, my sponsor asked me to start sending her daily gratitude. I have learned in this program that everything that I complain about or get upset about is also something to be grateful for. Sometimes I have trouble finding appreciation for the things I complain about. I can see my job as stressful; I can feel like I need to eat more; I can feel overwhelmed when my house needs cleaning; I can feel worried about what my kids are doing and who they will become. But when I think about gratitude, I am so grateful for my job, my abilities, my beautiful food and weight loss, having a home, and love for my kids.

Thinking about gratitude also helps me appreciate how far I've come. When I first came into the program, I used to go to food at every uncomfortable feeling. Beginning of the year transitions, end of year transitions, middle of the year transitions, ha ha ha. Every minute is a transition that I used to go to food to cope with. That has completely disappeared. I have neutrality around most transitions, and the connection to food at those times has pretty much disappeared.

I also used to feel much more resentful. I used to blame everyone for my problems. The Big Book and working the steps have helped me realize that if I'm not the problem, there is no solution. When I am upset, I am now aware that the problem is the glasses I'm wearing, and I am looking for faults in others. I am so grateful, and so are others in my life, that I no longer blame everyone for my problems. A lot of the time I have neutrality around blame.

Another area where I have neutrality is around trying to figure things out and push through situations rather than getting quiet and hearing God's perspective. I used to push hard to figure things out, and now I take time each day to pray and hear God's messages for me. The messages come through during my meditation time, but they can also pop into my mind while I'm doing anything, as long as I am open. Messages come through other people, or pop into my mind at a quiet moment, or I can even forget my question and the problem is resolved without any effort sometimes.

When my sponsor first asked me to begin writing gratitudes, after a couple of weeks I told her it wasn't really making a difference in my feeling gratitude on a regular basis, except while I was writing them. But I can see that gratitude is penetrating my compulsive, obsessive mind and permeating my life in new ways all the time!

Michelle JB



Share your exprience, strength and hope in the 1st quarter 2027 Serenity Times

Theme: FAITH

Send your submissions to:
wuignewsletter@gmail.com

Deadline: December 21st

Looking for meetings?



Go to: https://oa.org/find-a-meeting/

An opportunity to share, inspire and serve...

Whether it's a heartfelt reflection, a creative story, a witty observation, or favorite piece from OA approved literature—your words have the power to help and serve others. Our newsletter thrives on the diverse voices of our members, and we want you to share yours. This is your space to inform, inspire, and connect with your fellows.

You can submit your contributions to the newsletter by emailing wuignewsletter@gmail.com.

Cindy A.
Editor, Serenity Times



OA Responsibility Pledge

Always to extend the hand and heart of OA to all who share my compulsion; for this I am responsible.

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Need a sponsor? Are you an available sponsor?
Email: Carly S. wuigsponsor@gmail.com

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We are fully self-supporting through our own contributions. Send your check to: Westchester United Intergroup of OA, PO Box 125, White Plains, NY 10603. wuigtreasurer@gmail.com. State your contribution distribution in the MEMO section. PayPal Link



Please contribute what you can; we need you more than your money. OA World Service suggests $5 for each meeting.

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What we do have to offer is far greater… a Fellowship in which we find and share the healing power of love.

The 12 Steps & 12 Traditions OA, 2nd ed, p1

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