



# Serenity Times

A Westchester United Intergroup Publication: 1st Quarter 2022

## Abstinence

### OA Zoom Meetings:

Access the virtual meeting schedule, via Google Doc or pdf:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/18bXW0gCJEVsxVYO-WGe\\_ZqSTsOjOtx83I94zBV0wuY0/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/18bXW0gCJEVsxVYO-WGe_ZqSTsOjOtx83I94zBV0wuY0/edit)

Downloading Google Docs and Google Drive apps will allow you to access the most up-to-date version of the meeting schedule.



### Abstinence is Freedom



God, grant me freedom from the desire to eat compulsively and from the desire to eat foods that impair my conscious contact with you. Grant me freedom from foul emotions, thoughts, words, deeds, and from the bondage of self, so that I may always live in Your grace.

Diane T

### Overeaters Anonymous

#### Step One:

We admitted we were powerless over food — that our lives had become unmanageable.

### Abstinence

is the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight.

Spiritual, emotional, and physical recovery is the result of living and working the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve Step program on a daily basis. (oa.org)



WhatsApp

### JOIN OUR WHATSAPP!

OA WESTCHESTER FELLOWSHIP! TEXT YOUR FIRST NAME AND INITIAL OF YOUR LAST NAME TO

DIANE T: (914) 659-0192



### WhatsApp!

OA FOOD FORUM:

PLANS, PONDERING, & PITFALLS.

JOIN US. TEXT DIANE T:  
(914) 659-0192





## OA Promise

**I put my hand in yours, and together  
we can do what we could never do alone.**

**No longer is there a sense of hopelessness,  
no longer must we each depend upon our own unsteady willpower.  
We are all together now, reaching out our hands for power and strength  
greater than ours, and as we join hands,  
we find love and understanding beyond our wildest dreams.**

**Best wishes this holiday season to all fellows in our OA family!**

**A special thanks to Nick M. for inspiring  
the theme of Abstinence in this newsletter.**

**Your editor, Diane T**

*Peace on Earth*





Dear Serenity Times Readers,

I am writing to you on behalf of Diane T, our amazing newsletter editor. We wish you the happiest of holidays, in whatever way you celebrate them. And for those who don't celebrate holidays, we wish you the happiest of days. This issue focuses on Abstinence, and we wanted you to be able to read it before the holidays, which are so challenging to so many of us.

Please remember that this is a We program. We need all of you, because if we could have recovered alone, we would have. We all need each other, so please reach out to one another to support others' and your own (!) recovery. We are grateful for you.

All the very best to you,

Carol G. for Diane T.

P.S. Enjoy this issue. Let us know your thoughts and feelings and any ideas you have for future issues.

# Holiday Tips

## Getting Through the Holidays Abstainently



1. Focus on the true meaning of the holiday or event rather than the food. From the perspective of food, treat the holiday like any other day.
2. Skip any parties/eating occasions you're nervous about. If there's one you can't skip, text someone before and after the event.
3. Don't project about holiday temptations; remember "one day at a time."
4. Line up extra OA activities (meetings, phone calls, service).
5. Don't set yourself up to feel bad because of unrealistic expectations of what the holiday will bring. Be ready to not be part of family dysfunction. Be ready to be alone if you must. Don't sit around feeling sorry for yourself. Get busy. Read, walk, write.
6. Build up your recovery bank account before and during the holidays by attending lots of meetings (especially special holiday meetings) and working hard on your recovery. The disease doesn't take holidays.
7. Virtual zoom meetings (including phone call-in) are now available almost 24 hours a day 7 days a week on <http://oafootsteps.com>.
8. Keep your OA phone numbers with you always. Use them.
9. Know your limits. When in doubt, avoid persons, places and things that have in the past triggered over-eating.
10. Have some nice fruit ready for yourself while others are doing the cakes and pies.
11. Choose to focus on the people rather than the food. Have some real conversations.
12. Try to really connect with people at the holiday table. Make food a secondary thing.
13. Don't give junk out at Halloween that you wouldn't eat yourself.
14. Call on your HP for help before and during the meal.
15. Call your sponsor before you sit down to commit your food. The answering machine also takes commitments.
16. If you're visiting others, it's up to you to know what is being served and whether it is something that you choose to eat. Call the host. Plan accordingly. People understand others' food limitations. Even people without our disease have foods they don't eat for one reason or another. Volunteer to bring something that's good for you. The host thinks you're gracious, and you're taking care of yourself!
17. If you're visiting with your parents or grandparents, don't slip into old childish roles where you feel you must eat whatever you're given.
18. Gratitude list: There is nothing as good for staying abstinent-particularly during the Thanksgiving season- than focusing on the many things we have.
19. The most dangerous time for most of us is the day AFTER the holiday. Plan to go to a meeting.
20. Holidays come every year. They are simply calendar times set aside to honor certain things. We deal with the holidays just like we deal with the rest of the days in the year. You can do it. Relax and work your program the way you know how.
21. Even if you cannot give material gifts, you can share the gift of your recovery and enjoy the beauty of the holidays.

# My Abstinence Is...

## Twelve Fellows Share Their Plan

“No sugar, three meals and two snacks.”

“No salty snacks and drinking only water.”

“No sugar, dairy, wheat, or artificial sweeteners.”

“Weighing and measuring four meals a day with a max of 2,000 calories.”

“Weighing myself only once a month, eating meals at a table with no distractions, daily: four servings of protein, six servings of vegetables, two servings of fruit, two servings of fats, and no sugar.”

“Eating whatever I want as long as it’s five hundred calories per meal with three meals a day.”

“No eating after dinner, in front of the television, while using the computer, or when on the phone.”



“Eating three balanced meals a day with a goal of 1,700 calories for the day.”

“Feeding my family the same healthy food I prepare for myself and not having any *treats* in the house.”

“Preparing the forthcoming week’s meals on a Sunday, labeling and storing meals in the freezer, with the Grey Sheet food plan.”

“Smoothie for breakfast and lunch, and, while preparing dinner, tying a scarf over my face, bandit-style. I drink two cups of coffee in the morning, one in the afternoon, and water throughout the day.”

“I only eat the food plan written up by my nutritionist, at home, and do not eat at restaurants or in other people’s homes, unless I have brought my own food.”



## My name is Jennifer and I am ...

...a grateful, recovering, compulsive overeater. Grateful, because my disease brought me to the doors of Overeaters Anonymous. Grateful, because I learned in the rooms of OA that I had a disease, and it had a name. A name that fit me and I have been using it ever since 1987. Recovering...because I will never recover from this disease. I am given the gift of daily reprieve, if and only if I work the program to the best of my ability, one day at a time. An integral part of working the program is using the tool of a plan of eating.

*What does a day of ABSTINENCE look like in my life?* A day of my abstinent life has changed over the years. I retired December 31, 2020. I now have time each day to begin my day with the Third Step Prayer, followed by ninety minutes of prayer and meditation with my sister. I either attend the 7:15AM NY OA meeting, or I have another one-hour spiritual practice. I write my food for the day. (For the first 10 years, maybe more, as my sponsors changed, I would send them my food for the day). I read a couple of daily meditation books, one OA approved literature, one AA approved, one my EA. I may not read all each day. I reflect and write on my reflection, or, if I am disturbed/troubled, I try to put my thoughts and feelings on paper. When I attend meetings, I usually write bits and pieces that touch me and relate them to my life. With the gift of virtual OA meetings nationally, I can and do attend more than three meetings a week.

*What do I eat and not eat?* My plan of eating, in partnership with my Higher Power, consists of no sugar, no white flour, and no binge foods (these have changed along the way). There are foods that I am now allergic to. How do I know? I break out in hives or I itch after eating them, including some of the healthiest fruits and vegetables. They are excluded from my food plan. In consultation with a nutritionist, I have an approved list of foods I can include as snacks, if needed. Sometimes, I need a snack if I am out and will not get to lunch or dinner, and the time between meals will be longer than four hours.

*Food choices:* I have three to four choices for breakfast, which include cold cereal, hot cereal, bread and nut butter, or flaxseed granola. I use a plant-based milk. I make a vegetable soup, weekly for lunch (ingredients include zucchini, carrots, broccoli, collard greens, butternut squash, chicken broth or water, chick peas, two tablespoons coconut milk, seasoning- cumin, cinnamon, onion and garlic powder; blended and bottled), and I have that with a plant-based protein and dairy. I have one large apple, which I divide into halves or thirds and have at breakfast, lunch, and/or dinner. I usually eat a salad for dinner. I drink, on a good day, at least three, twenty-four ounce bottles of water a day. On a bad day, I drink two. I also limit coffee to one cup a day at breakfast. I stopped using artificial sweeteners in my coffee (May 2020), and I no longer drink diet sodas (3-4/day) since 2015.

*How many meals and snacks?* Usually, three meals a day with optional snack. For years, it was three meals a day with nothing in between. I had to redefine abstinence after several years and slips, especially after three p.m. I also had to take a hard look at what menopause did to my life, my abstinence, and my mood!!! So, the plan of eating I started with, over thirty-three years ago, is not my plan of eating today. Do I follow it perfectly? No, I do not. I heard this at a meeting, and I include it in my definition of abstinence: I treat myself with gentle, loving kindness and (I include) honesty with myself and my sponsor.

*What are the abstinent behaviors you embrace?* I am still working on this area. I do not taste food, even when cooking for my family. I weigh meat, chicken, fish, and some vegetables, like raw carrots. I measure my dairy, including milk, and my soup. I do not measure lettuce.

The OA -12 Step program gave me a life that I have enjoyed and continue to enjoy. There have been lots of hardships and trials along the way. I can honestly say that I wake up most days looking forward to the day, because I am not afraid of my kitchen nor of the foods in it. Food and I can co-exist for today, One Day At A Time.

Jennifer in Ohio

Weekly Meal Plan				
	Breakfast	Lunch	Snacks	Dinner
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

# My Abstinence, For Today

Staci A.

I have three meals and three snacks per day, with the guidance of a nutritionist, and designed for those in recovery from food addiction or compulsive eating, using the addictive model and a 12-Step recovery program as found in a non-OA book.

My abstinence statement:

“For today, I commit to my abstinence of refraining from emotional and nighttime eating.”

The first two weeks were grueling and miserable, detoxing from sugar and Diet Coke. Through G-d and my sponsor, I was able to get through, one moment at a time, especially at the beginning. Being abstinent allows me to be free from the obsession of compulsive overeating and my addiction to sugar. My abstinence is imperfect. I weigh and measure as well as abstain from sugar, sugar-free substitutes, flour, and powdered starches. With packaged foods, I abstain from them should they contain any sugars, starches, and flours in the first four ingredients.

## Meals (protein, carb, fat, veg)\*\* Snacks (protein, fruit)

Breakfast: 7:30am (protein, cereal, fruit) Snack: 9:30am

Lunch: 12:00pm\*\* Snack: 3:30pm

Dinner: 5:30pm\* Snack: 8:30pm (Meta)

Food Plan	
<b>Breakfast Option A:</b>	
2	oz Protein (8oz of Milk or Yogurt can be used for that (1oz) ounce of Protein.
4-6	oz Fruit
<b>Breakfast Option B:</b>	
4-8	oz Milk or Yogurt (1oz of protein can be used for the (8oz) of Milk/Yogurt.
4-6	oz Fruit
1	oz Cereal-(weigh the cereal-dry- first, then add your milk/water)
<b>Morning Snack</b>	
1	oz Protein (8oz of Milk or Yogurt can be used for 1oz of Protein)
4-6	oz Fruit OR Vegetable
<b>LUNCH</b>	
3	oz Protein (cook your food first then weigh it: chicken, meat, fish, turkey, tofu...)
3	oz Carbohydrate ( cook your food first, then weigh it: potato, brown rice, quinoa..)
2-4	oz Vegetable (can be raw or cooked- same range for vegetables either way)
12-15	gr Fat (grams of Fat refer to the Total grams of fat from the nutrition label)
<b>Afternoon Snack</b>	
1	oz Protein (8oz of Milk or Yogurt can be used for 1oz of Protein)
4-6	oz Fruit OR Vegetable
<b>DINNER</b>	
3	oz Protein (cook your food first then weigh it: chicken, meat, fish, turkey, tofu...)
3	oz Carbohydrate ( cook your food first, then weigh it: potato, brown rice, quinoa..)
2-4	oz Vegetable (can be raw or cooked- same weight range for vegetables either way)
12-15	grm Fat (grams of Fat refer to the Total grams of fat from the nutrition label)
<b>Evening Snack "Meta"</b>	
1	oz Protein (8oz of Milk or Yogurt can be used for 1oz of Protein)
4-6	oz Fruit OR Vegetable

# Daily Practice of Abstinence



Abstinence is 100% a practice, and I don't get it perfectly each day. I separate a plan of eating from abstinence. A plan of eating is a tool I use to achieve and maintain abstinence - one of many tools.

In terms of foods, flour and sugar are poison for me. Whatever you want to call them, trigger foods, red-light foods. What this means for me is that when I ingest those substances, my body begins to crave more. I might be able to hold off that craving for a day; I might have really strong willpower and be able to eat one cookie, but eventually my willpower depletes, and I lose the power of choice. The addictive food is stronger than I am, and I give in, which leads to a painful, disgusting binge. Thank God I have not had to do that in almost three years. BUT, I am still powerless over food. I am powerless over the effect that certain foods have on me.

I am also powerless over the effect any food has on me if I start "grazing." I do not have an off switch. I have binged on broccoli, binged on oatmeal, binged on beans, so, I use a plan of eating. I eat three meals a day and one snack. The snack is flexible, which makes life a lot more manageable. I prefer to have it between lunch and dinner, but if I have to have a late lunch, I'll have it a few hours after breakfast.

What gives me the power to follow this plan of eating? Certainly not me! When I wake up, I read a few meditation books from OA, AA, and a few other fellowships. I write on those books or about whatever is swirling in my brain. If I'm uncertain about the events of the day, I write out an action plan. First, I'll eat breakfast, then do work, then a meeting, then make a call, etc. This calms my brain, even if I don't follow it exactly. In addition to reading and writing, I meditate for ten to fifteen minutes and then pray for God's will throughout the day. I ask for abstinence, sobriety, serenity, and willingness to follow God's will. Some days I don't have time for meditation, but I really prefer making time for it. I try to make one or two phone calls a day to fellows. Often, this is in the car. I have a call with my sponsor twice a week and a call with my sponsee once a week, although she usually checks in other days as well.

One of the most important practices of my recovery is pausing. When I get home from work, I sit in the car for five minutes just to meditate, release the stress of the day, and to think about what I'll do when I get into the house. These five minutes are CRUCIAL to stopping my compulsive activity. After I cook my food I wait five minutes before I eat. Maybe I'll stretch or pray or clean up, just to put a little space between preparing a meal and eating helps stop that compulsive internal drive. Do I do this every time? No, but more than half the time, I do.

And the meetings. KEY TO RECOVERY. Not sufficient, but NECESSARY. I need to be with fellows, sharing honestly, listening, being in the space of recovery. I love in-person meetings, but Zoom is great, too, especially because I split time between Westchester and Dutchess Counties right now. I aim for two to three a week. Sometimes it's four, and I feel great. I also do service. I'm the business chair for one group, I love intergroup, and I speak and lead meetings whenever I can. Recovery is hard work, but it's worth it. I have a life I could not have imagined. Just not being a slave to food is life beyond my wildest dreams, but I am STILL POWERLESS. That I can't forget. I have enough relapses to prove that just because I'm in OA, it does not mean I am cured! I have this disease every day, and if I stop working on recovery, I will be bingeing before I know it. Relapse scares me. It's almost always on my fear inventory. I am scared of picking up the food. To combat that fear, I connect and do whatever I can to keep this fellowship going and to carry the message.

-Chelsea F.

# Living the Steps Inventory:

## A Roadmap to Abstinence

It is sad to hear the word "relapse" so much at meetings. I've been abstinent for many years and stay that way, because practicing these principles in all my affairs is how I live my life. Next month will be 40 years since I walked into that first OA meeting wanting to die, but not having the courage. I got a second chance at life, thanks to OA, which showed me how to follow a 12 Step process that resulted in a new physical, emotional and spiritual way of thinking and living. But the disease was not cured, only arrested. Holding on to freedom meant following the "treatment plan" for the rest of my life. I have. So can others. Hopefully, the following inventory can be a useful tool for some of you to remember to live the "medicine" every day.

### 1. Honesty

*Basic Step:* Have I gotten honest with myself, accepted that I have a progressive and potentially fatal disease over which willpower is useless, and that I cannot treat food like a normal eater? Am I taking the actions that only I can take to deal with it?

*Spiritual:* Am I living in honesty in all aspects of my life, particularly self-honesty? Do I accept that I'm not truly in control of anything except my own priorities, attitudes, and actions?

### 2. Hope

*Basic Step:* Do I know, based on the miracles I see around me in the program, that there is in fact something greater than my willpower that will lead me to freedom from my food and unmanageability problem?

*Spiritual:* Do I cultivate an attitude of hope and positive thinking rather than gloominess, negativity, and faultfinding? Do I look for the good in people rather than their weaknesses? Does my positive attitude convey hope to the still suffering?

### 3. Faith

*Basic Step:* Have I let go of self-sufficiency and my attempts to control everything? Have I surrendered myself to a new set of ideas – the Steps, Traditions, and tools – which are in fact the power greater than myself that will free me from disease? Have I accepted that I'm not in charge of the world and that it will be what it will be in all its wonder, kindness, and love as well as its intolerance, unfairness, and injustice?

*Spiritual:* Am I living in faith that God loves me unconditionally, wants only good for me, wants me to be all I have the ability to become? Do I have faith that God will give me what I need to deal with whatever life brings? Do I leave tomorrow to God but do today what I think He would have me do to prepare for tomorrow? Do I accept that ultimately God is in charge of outcomes, but I'm in charge of action?

### 4. Courage

*Basic Step:* Have I done a thorough self-assessment of my strengths and weaknesses? Have I looked carefully at my ways of thinking and looking at life that set me up for conflict within myself and with others and block me from peace?

*Spiritual:* Do I face and deal with life as it is, not as I wish it were or think it ought to be? Do I allow HP to help me do the things I'm afraid to do but need to do? Is my courage to face and deal with life on life's terms an example to others?

## 5. Integrity

**Basic Step:** Have I shared the real me as written out in Step 4 with an experienced 12-Step person to help free me from myself and to get out of my mental isolation? Have I validated that I have been honest with myself by sharing my writing with another human being and then identifying specifically what needs changing in my thinking and behavior?

**Spiritual:** Does my everyday behavior match my true values or is there still dissonance between my inside and outside? Am I being open, being who I am, being my true self, being part of the world rather than hiding out?

## 6. Willingness

**Basic Step:** Have I become willing to surrender to God those things in me that need changing? Have I cooperated with God by showing through my everyday behavior and actions a willingness to let go of the traits, attitudes and behaviors identified in Steps 4 and 5 that cause me trouble? Am I doing my part by trying to practice the opposites of the shortcomings as best I can? For example, am I practicing courage and faith instead of fear, forgiveness instead of resentment, service rather than selfishness?

**Spiritual:** Am I maintaining an open-minded, flexible, and accepting attitude toward life, knowing the only constant in the world is change? Am I always willing to learn and change and cooperate with the guidance of my HP? Do I remember that I can be willing to do things I don't want to do?

## 7. Humility

**Basic Step:** Have I surrendered my shortcomings to God, prayed that He remove them and help me learn to live in the solutions? Am I willing to go to any lengths to become a new me?

**Spiritual:** Am I teachable, rightsized, openminded – no better than, no worse than others, a simple child of God? Have I let go of status-seeking, pride, thoughts, or actions belittling myself or others?

## 8. Self-discipline and forgiveness

**Basic Step:** Have I made the list and become willing to take responsibility for my past actions or lack of actions? Have I forgiven myself for my mistakes? Have I forgiven those whom I have harmed who also inflicted harm on me?

**Spiritual:** Do I practice self-discipline in my words and actions toward others so as to not hurt them? Am I forgiving others and myself for not being perfect? Am I holding any grudges? Have I given up blaming? Do I take the actions every day I need to take to keep myself in fit physical, emotional and spiritual condition?

## 9. Love

**Basic Step:** Have I made all my amends? Have I cleaned up my past and moved forward, free from guilt and shame?

**Spiritual:** Is my spiritual mindset one of unconditional love for myself and other human beings? Do I accept others as they are, instead of wishing they were different? Am I being an adult and taking full responsibility for my life, my actions and my feelings? Am I living my amends where appropriate?

## 10. Perseverance

**Basic Step:** Do I do an ongoing mental self-assessment during the day and a more structured one at the end of the day, looking particularly at how I'm doing on the things that I identified in Steps 4-7 that needed changing? Do I ensure through ongoing amends that I don't accumulate emotional baggage that will need to be cleaned up later?

**Spiritual:** Do I keep moving forward, never quitting, continuing to grow toward becoming more useful to myself, to others and to God? Do I remember that complacency in my daily disciplines is the enemy of sustained recovery?

## 11. Spiritual Awareness/Connection

**Basic Step:** Do I make, or try to make, connection every day through prayer and meditation with my HP to understand what His will is in every area of my life? Do I listen?

**Spiritual Principle:** Am I letting my HP be my compass instead of my logic? Do I cultivate things and people who nourish my soul? Do I remember that it's HP ultimately that heals, but that I need to put myself in a position to receive that healing miracle? Do I try to keep growing spiritually?

## 12. Service

**Basic Step:** Am I helping others with my disease find the solution that worked for me? Am I doing everything I can to support meetings and OA's service groups so that OA continues to exist? Am I trying to live OA 12-step principles in all parts of my life?

**Spiritual:** Has my attitude toward life changed from self-centered to other-centered, from *How can I Get* to *How Can I Be Useful*? Am I putting-in rather than taking-out? Do I feel that I'm allowing God to serve others through me? Do I realize that there are no pictures in our literature, which means I am the only picture a newcomer sees? Am I living by the step principles: honesty, hope, faith, courage, integrity, willingness, humility, self-discipline and forgiveness, love, perseverance, spiritual awareness, service?

### OA 12 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.

Don C.

<https://doncoa.wordpress.com/2021/12/06/living-the-steps-inventory/>

## A day in the life of an abstinent OAer



I have been in program since February 2010.

I came in at 284 pounds after years of only temporarily successful dieting.

After all those years, I realized I could not follow/ was not able to follow a diet more than sixty percent of the time. I'd get weighed weekly, attend the meetings of a pay-and-weigh regularly, and be mortified and demoralized at the diminishing returns (and NO diminishing in weight) over time.

When I started attending OA meetings, the plan of eating involved whole, non-processed foods from the pay-and-weigh. I quickly realized that the "extra points" of non-whole foods were not working for me. My original sponsor asked me to make a written list of my binge foods, and I did. I was then surprised when she told me that I would no longer be eating from that list. I listened to her, reluctantly, and stopped eating those foods. Included in those foods were junk foods of all kinds (baked goods, sugary, and salty snacks), and white flour and white rice. At that point, my abstinence was defined as: no binge foods, three meals a day, one snack, and turning over my food daily to my sponsor. There were some ups and downs, and a break in my abstinence from overeating one of the foods I considered okay. When I told my sponsor that I had overeaten, she asked me if it was a break in my abstinence. I told her that I was not sure. She then asked me if what I ate would be something I would list on my food plan for the day. I answered that I would not have listed that on a plan. Then it became clear that I had broken my abstinence. My sponsor told me that if I could not stay abstinent, she could not sponsor me. This shocked and angered me. I wondered whether she really understood how hard it was for me to stop eating. She explained that she could not sponsor the disease. She told me that maybe I had not gone low enough, that maybe I had some more learning to do before I would be ready to go to any lengths to recover. This upset me, but the approach by my sponsor got me thinking in a way that drove me towards further recovery and with more gusto.

Fast forward a number of years and a couple of sponsors later. I have spent a lot of time learning the program and taking many program actions every day. I have learned from fellows in meetings and in sponsorship a myriad of ways to take action to recover. I have also studied the Big Book's and our literature's instructions. Over time, my food plan and definition of abstinence has evolved a lot. As I eliminated the original binge list, new foods emerged that I needed to eliminate. When I was eating all that original junk food, there were other foods I did not choose. But now that the first level foods were off my plan, there was a second-choice list that emerged and also needed to be eliminated; these foods included corn and all corn products, all potatoes, all rice, dried fruits, nuts, and sugar-free candy. This program has taught me that what the regular people in the world consider "healthy food" has nothing to do with what is healthy for me. My list of no-fly foods is 100% based on what I would not stop eating if left to my own unruly, addict instincts. Over time, miraculously, I became willing to weigh and measure almost all my foods. I became willing to share 100% of what I eat with my sponsor. I became willing to eat between 1200 and 1500 calories a day. I put everything I eat into an app on my phone. Every. Single. Thing. Every. Single. Day. The app calculates the calories, and I send that list to my sponsor. I have released about 118 pounds (today I weigh 165.6 pounds) in this program, by the grace of G-d, one day at a time. Today, I think a break in my abstinence would be eating any of my no-fly foods, or not telling my sponsor 100% of what I am eating. Thank you G-d. Thank you OA.

## Following Directions: How I Got Abstinent and How I Stay Abstinent

I got abstinent by being willing to admit myself to the metaphorical OA hospital and say, “Okay, I give up. Tell me what to do.” They told me the first thing was to detox from the addictive junk foods I was endlessly consuming. I didn’t believe in addiction, but I decided to pretend and see what happened. That meant three weighed and measured meals a day, no sugar or refined carbohydrates. I figured I couldn’t do it all my life, but I would play their game and when I got thin, I would leave and be able to control it myself.

I started on the 12 steps within a few weeks when my brain had cleared up from the sugar, flour, and excess food. They told me I was now in a race. What race? It was the race between the eventual decline of my willpower and the acquisition of a new power that would come from working the 12 steps. It was willpower that helped me follow my plan of eating initially, but they said willpower would eventually run out, and had to be replaced by another kind of power. I didn’t know what they were talking about, but my pain gave me the willingness to follow directions. My way hadn’t worked. Why not surrender, at least for a while, to another set of ideas.

Meetings, endless meetings. I went almost every day. But I still argued with my ‘tough love’ sponsor. He asked, “Did you come here to argue or get well?” I didn’t exactly know what ‘well’ meant, but I was grudgingly willing to keep following directions. Then there was all that studying of something called a Big Book about a bunch of drunks and how they stopped drinking – and stayed stopped. I began to see that I used food like they used alcohol. Like them, my problem had small beginnings, but eventually overtook and consumed me.

Willingness was key to everything. Physically, I was willing to accept that the disease was stronger than my willpower; to put structure into my eating; to plan my meals and commit them to someone; to let go of problem foods; to put abstinence before everything – no exceptions.

Emotionally, I became willing to accept that I was the enemy, not circumstances, and that my problems got fixed by changing myself, not others. I became willing to face life as it was, to take responsibility, and to forgive myself and others for being human.

Spiritually, I very slowly began to have a relationship with a Higher Power. In retrospect, I can see my recovery was a gift, but it was working and living the 12 steps that put me in a position to receive that gift.

In three months, I will mark 40 years – half my life. I’m maintaining a triple-digit weight loss. I’m abstinent. I live a full and useful life, free from any battle with food. But I still have the disease. The obsession is arrested, but the disease is forever, which means I cannot treat food like normal eaters. I need a structured plan of eating and a way of thinking and living that keep me in fit spiritual condition. That means living the ideas and principles of the steps, traditions, tools and slogans.

Every single morning without exception I start my day with steps 10 and 11, which for me include: inventory; planning my food, work, and attitude for the day; reading OA and other daily readers; writing how the “truths” in the readings apply to my life; a gratitude list; prayers (serenity, third, seventh, eleventh and others); affirmations; meditation.

OA saved my life and gave me a second chance at making a life. Now I’m giving back through living a spiritually based life based on patience, tolerance, kindness, love, and service.

<https://doncoa.wordpress.com/2021/11/03/following-directions-how-i-got-abstinent-and-how-i-stay-abstinent/>

Don C.

## A Day of Abstinence



A day of abstinence for me is sticking to my plan of eating for the day and texting my sponsor with any changes. I've lost thirty pounds by doing this, as well as by eliminating gluten and sugar. I have three meals a day, plus a snack in the evening. Some behaviors I embrace include always looking up menus on-line before I eat out and taking healthy snacks or food with me to gatherings with friends where I know sugary items will be served. I pray every morning for the willingness to stick to my plan. HP is always with me.

Chris B



## 3 — 0 — 1

I've been in program a long time, and my abstinence has changed during the last two years. Today, I preplan my meals, since, like my sponsor has reminded me, failing to plan is planning to fail. I practice 3-0-1: three meals a day, nothing in between, one day at a time. Before, I allowed myself an afternoon snack. I've also stopped eating flour-based foods, such as bread and rolls. I have lost twenty pounds, despite many physical setbacks.

I live in a senior residential facility, and two out of my three meals are prepared for me. As a result, I cannot weigh and measure my food, but make good food choices.

The food is only one part of my abstinence. Other facets of my daily program include morning readings from *For Today* and at least ten minutes of *Voices of Recovery*. I meditate most mornings and exercise during the day. I occasionally reach out to other fellows with phone calls. My program is far from perfect, but it has been working well for me.

I am grateful for the wonderful abstinence I've had in the last two years and for the great sponsor who has helped me maintain it.

Rita F.

# Learning the Taste of Abstinence



I am barely one month into the OA program, and have decided to go about my abstinence, as of October first, by following a dietitian's recommendations..

PORTION CONTROL is the key, and she gave me a daily nutrition target.

I am amping up water to a minimum of 50 oz/day.

Daily food log (apps annoy me, so I use a small notebook and transfer to an Excel that I review with the dietitian weekly).

I favor carbs with high fiber content in bread and crackers.

I avoid added sugar in canned products (tomato sauce, etc.). I never use sweetener.

I sprinkle my salads with ground flax seeds and use my own tahini-lemon dressing.

I discovered overnight oats and chia seeds.

I recalibrate my portions and am learning to eyeball them, because I eat out for lunch and I go out to friends' sometimes.

I DO NOT restrict, because it has always backfired. I can have more if I feel like it, but I haven't needed to over the last four weeks.

As I slowly transition to a more plant-based food plan, I am limiting red meat to once a week and enjoy it fully, eggs twice per week and I am eating more seafood.

I am learning about plant based proteins. I discovered black rice and black bean or mung bean spaghetti. I discovered buddha bowls and I have a few variations of those. I am getting good at seasoning and sauteing tofu.

I use flavors, spices, and colors (nothing like cherry, heirloom tomatoes to brighten a dish). When I cook, I always have an attractive, colorful plate.

While I have dinner (I live alone) I am mindfully slowing down, eating with a dessert fork, or using my non-dominant hand, which allows me to enjoy every bite.

No foods are off limits for now. I even allow myself an occasional dessert. There are foods I haven't touched, including white flour, pasta, and bread. I'll see how it goes when I do have them, and if I need to adjust.

Thanks to my HP, being in the rooms and not feeling alone has allowed me to be consistent with my plan. Something is working, because I am down ten pounds.

Laura P in NYC

# Transformational Abstinence



When I started the OA program, thirty years ago, I had no idea what abstinence was. I knew I was desperate to lose weight and had tried every diet I could think of, but I failed time and again. I would lose weight and gain even more back. My first sponsor put me on a food plan of three meals a day and no sugar. I had to tell her what I ate each day. I did this for thirty days and decided I wasn't losing weight fast enough and couldn't understand what the Steps were that everyone was talking about. I left OA.

The journey of leaving OA and then returning when my weight or life became chaotic became my path. I stayed in the back of the rooms, did not connect, did not get a sponsor, or, if I did, I never called her. Then willingness hit me. I don't know why or how, but one night a speaker said something that changed everything: all I needed was willingness, and I was willing.

That night I got a sponsor and really listened to her. That was eight years ago. I had three meals a day, no flour or sugar, and weighed and measured my food. I worked the Steps and began to see the weight was a symptom of a disease. I am a compulsive eater, and without a spiritual change I was destined to turn to food anytime life threw me a curve. I wish that had been my last return from relapse, but it was not.

I regained my abstinence in March of 2015. I relapsed that Christmas before and was not coming back. God had other plans. A friend whom I had known in the program called me when he hadn't seen me for a few months and asked me if I wanted to go to a meeting. I did.

My abstinence today is very different due to health issues, so I eat six small meals a day. I eliminated some foods that I knew were triggers and which set off gastrointestinal issues. I eat two ounces of oatmeal and berries for breakfast with almond milk. Two hours later I have two more ounces of oatmeal. Lunch consists of three ounces of protein, a vegetable, and a small cup of soup. In the middle of the afternoon, I have a piece of fruit and a quarter of an avocado, or three ounces of a protein. Dinner consists of three ounces of protein and two servings of vegetables. Before bed I have three more ounces of protein or a soup.

It works for me. My abstinence does not look like my sponsor's but that's okay. It may not look like anyone else's either, but it works for me. I have maintained a 103 pound weight loss for five years. I check with my health care specialist if I'm having an issue. Today, I have a team and no longer make food choices alone.

Deborah S.



## A Day in the Life of Abstinence

*May the secular in my life be supplanted by the sacred.* This is the thread that weaves through my prayers from the moment I wake up in the morning, and as I continue to pray, while fixing breakfast for me and my two furry roommates. Whipped in a blender are two cups of coffee with stevia, a piece of orange rind, a couple shakes of cinnamon, vanilla protein powder, and ice. This yummy potion is accompanied by a bowl of warm oat bran mixed with egg whites and spices. Supplements chased down with water seal the deal.

Approximately five to six hours later, I generally consume a pound, or more, of fresh vegetables, 5-6 oz of protein (fish, poultry, a non-gmo soy or pea product, beans, nuts, or seeds) and follow up lunch with a protein drink. I need 40-50 grams of protein three times a day to meet my body's unique demands. At barely 110 lbs., I know it's a lot more than what most people my size would need, but time and again my body has shown me when I consume less, I have brittle nails, hair loss, sore muscles, and the protein deficit shows up in my blood work. The average person's estimated protein needs are a pinch less than half one's bodyweight in grams per day. So, someone my weight, and without my issues, may get along okay with fifty grams of protein per day, a third of what I consume. This is just an example of how our bodies are unique, and, therefore, our food plans can differ remarkably.

Sugar is the biggest red-list offender I steer clear of. I have been abstinent from sugar for two years. Yellow-list foods, such as bread, pasta, potatoes, and fresh or dried fruit, are occasionally woven into my food plan, but in small amounts, so as not to trigger my pancreas into dumping excess insulin and setting me up to crave more food.

Dinner is usually the same as lunch. The fresh vegetables, at both meals, are usually raw, but sometimes steamed or folded into hot soup just prior to serving. Salt, pepper, and garlic are my go-to spices, and I use them liberally.

I allow myself an occasional bag of microwave popcorn, a yellow-list food, drink approximately four liters of fluid per day, and let my sponsor know if I am about to amend my food plan.

I feel best when I do not eat between meals, as doing so tends to confuse my appetat, throwing my body out of rhythm, and setting me up to want to eat more.

The cleaner my abstinent eating is, the deeper my communion is with God, operating without the interference of the disease of compulsive overeating.

# Sweet, Sweet Surrender!



## Without Abstinence Is

This cunning and baffling malady, this affliction, this disease – substance use disorder. This commitment to not feel and to not face the reality of life's situations, that kills off jobs, relationships, families, and all that's good. The steadfast need to numb out, at all costs, with walking, running, and sprinting away from life, ironically, as if my life depends upon it. The single focused effort to obtain the temporary hit and relief with substances, behaviors, and dopamine-rushes that alter moods with deadly, diminishing returns. The bone-crushing juggernaut and unmanageability builds upon itself to shrink, to compress, and to eventually extinguish life. The three-legged stool of spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being can get whittled and chopped down to uselessness, leaving me at death's door.

All this and more has put me, and other fellows, in a place where we waved the white flag yelling, "no MAS!" A bottom where we were/are sick and tired of being sick and tired, in total despair, with nowhere else to go.

I can't do this anymore. I need good orderly direction (GOD): help me, teach me, coach me, mentor me, sponsor me. Love me until I can love myself!

John B





## *How do you handle chronic pain while remaining abstinent in your OA program?*

### "No Matter What"

Working and living the OA program have enabled me to sustain recovery for nearly 40 years despite life's many difficult realities. The most recent reality is the most challenging: unfixable chronic physical pain and disability. I have transitioned from athlete, hiker, kayaker, always-on-the-move guy to someone with 24/7 neuropathy in both legs and a damaged spine that makes standing fully upright almost impossible, and walking unassisted impossible. A walker with wheels is my new best friend.

The challenges I face in this phase of life: grief, depression, disappointment, anxiety, fear of uselessness and becoming a burden. What helps me are the same things that have given me a phenomenal life of usefulness: OA's 12 Steps, 12 Traditions, and 9 tools. Working the Steps and using all the tools has arrested the obsession, giving me recovery and a triple-digit weight loss. Holding on to the miracle of recovery means living the Steps, Traditions, tools, and slogans.

I continue to work and live the program to hold on to abstinence and recovery-- every day, despite pain and disability. I don't pick up trigger foods, no matter what. Every morning I read, write, pray, meditate, say affirmations and plan my day and food. I continue to sponsor people through the Steps; I still conduct 15-week step studies. I do as much service as possible at all levels. I'm in charge of how I feel and what I do. I'm not a victim. God didn't make this happen. What God does is help me keep on keeping on. God and I are in this together. A favorite plaque reads: *Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain.*

Thank you, OA, for helping me learn to dance in the rain.

- Don C.  
Connecticut



## The Serenity Times

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