

The OA Tools of Recovery

Read the Introduction and the list of eight tools, then read about Service and one other tool or share on one or both tools in your own words.

Introduction

In working Overeaters Anonymous' Twelve-Step program of recovery from compulsive overeating, we have found a number of tools to assist us. We use these tools regularly to help us achieve and maintain abstinence and recover from our disease.

- A Plan of Eating
- Sponsorship
- Meetings
- Telephone
- Writing
- Literature
- Anonymity
- Service
- Action Plan

In Overeaters Anonymous (OA) abstinence is defined as the act of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. Recovery is defined as the removal of the need to engage in compulsive eating behaviors. Spiritual, emotional, and physical recovery is achieved through working and living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve Step program. Many of us have found that we cannot abstain from compulsive eating unless we use some or all of OA's eight tools of recovery.

Tools of Recovery - 1

A Plan of Eating

As a tool, a plan of eating helps us abstain from compulsive eating, guides us in our dietary decisions, and defines what, when, how, where and why we eat.

There are no specific requirements for a plan of eating; OA does not endorse or recommend any specific plan of eating, nor does it exclude the personal use of one. (See the pamphlets Dignity of Choice and A Plan of Eating for more information.) For specific dietary or nutritional guidance, OA suggests consulting a qualified health care professional, such as a physician or dietitian.

Each of us develops a personal plan of eating based on an honest appraisal of his or her past experience. Many of us find it essential to take guidance from our sponsors to develop a plan of eating that reflects an honest desire to achieve and maintain abstinence. Although individual plans of eating are as varied as our members, most OA members agree that some plan—no matter how flexible or structured—is necessary.

This tool helps us deal with the physical aspects of our disease and achieve physical recovery. From this vantage point, we can more effectively follow OA's Twelve-Step program of recovery and move beyond the food to a happier, healthier and more spiritual life.

Tools of Recovery - 2

Sponsorship

Sponsors are OA members who are living the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability. They are willing to share their recovery with other members of the Fellowship and are committed to abstinence.

We ask a sponsor to help us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. By working with other members of OA and sharing their experience, strength and hope, sponsors continually renew and reaffirm their own recovery. Sponsors share their program up to the level of their own experience.

Ours is a program of attraction; find a sponsor who has what you want and ask that person how he or she is achieving it. A member may work with more than one sponsor and may change sponsors. However, many of us choose to work with just one sponsor. In either case, it's helpful to avoid changing sponsors frequently.

Meetings

Meetings are gatherings of two or more compulsive overeaters who come together to share their personal experience, and the strength and hope OA has given them. There are many types of meetings, but fellowship with other compulsive overeaters is the basis of them all. Meetings give us an opportunity to identify our common problem, confirm our common solution through the Twelve Steps and share the gifts we receive through this program. In addition to face-to-face meetings, OA offers telephone and online meetings that are useful in breaking down the deadly isolation caused by distance, illness or physical challenges.

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Telephone

Member-to-member contact helps us share on a one-to-one basis and avoid the isolation that is so common among us. Many members call, text or email their sponsors and other OA members daily. As part of the surrender process, these tools help us learn to reach out, ask for help and extend help to others. Telephone or electronic contact also provides an immediate outlet for those hard-to-handle highs and lows we may experience. Members should respect anonymity when leaving any type of voicemail or electronic message.

Writing

In addition to writing our inventories and the list of people we have harmed, most of us have found that writing has been an indispensable tool for working the Steps. Further, putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper, or describing a troubling incident, helps us to better understand our actions and reactions in a way that is often not revealed to us by simply thinking or talking about them. In the past, compulsive eating was our most common reaction to life.

When we put our difficulties down on paper, it becomes easier to see situations more clearly and perhaps better discern any necessary action.

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Literature

We read OA-approved books such as *Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition*; *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*; *Voices of Recovery*; *For Today*; and *Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book)*. We also study and read OA-approved pamphlets and *Lifeline*, our magazine of recovery. Many OA members find that reading literature daily further reinforces how to live the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. All our literature provides insight into our problem of eating compulsively, strength to deal with it, and the very real hope that there is a solution for us.

Anonymity

Anonymity, referred to in Traditions Eleven and Twelve, is a tool that guarantees we will place principles before personalities. The protection of anonymity offers each of us freedom of expression and safeguards us from gossip. Anonymity assures us that only we, as individual OA members, have the right to make our membership known within our community. Anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication means that we never allow our faces or last names to be used once we identify ourselves as OA members. This protects both the individual and the Fellowship.

Within the Fellowship, anonymity means that whatever we share with another OA member will be held in respect and confidence. What we hear at meetings should remain there. However, we understand that we must not allow anonymity to limit our effectiveness within the Fellowship.

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It is not a break of anonymity to use our full names within our group or OA service bodies. Also, it is not a break of anonymity to enlist Twelfth-Step help for group members in trouble, provided we are careful to refrain from discussing any specific personal information.

Another aspect of anonymity is that we are all equal in the Fellowship, whether we are newcomers or seasoned longtimers. And our outside status makes no difference in OA; we have no stars or VIPs. We come together simply as compulsive overeaters.

Service

Carrying the message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers is the basic purpose of our Fellowship; therefore, it is the most fundamental form of service. Any form of service—no matter how small—that helps reach a fellow sufferer adds to the quality of our own recovery. Members who are new to OA can give service by getting to meetings, putting away chairs, putting out literature, talking to newcomers, and doing whatever needs to be done for the group. Members who meet the abstinence requirement can give service beyond the group level in such activities as intergroup representative, committee chair, region representative or Conference delegate. There are many ways to give back what we have so generously been given. We are encouraged to do what we can when we can. “A life of sane and happy usefulness” is what we are promised as the result of working the Twelve Steps. Service helps to fulfill that promise.

As OA’s responsibility pledge states: “Always to extend the hand and heart of OA to all who share my compulsion; for this, I am responsible.”

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Action Plan

An action plan is the process of identifying and implementing attainable actions, both daily and long-term, that are necessary to support our individual abstinence and emotional, spiritual and physical recovery. While the plan is ours, tailored to our own recovery process, most of us find it important to work with a sponsor, fellow OA member and/or appropriate professional to help us create it. This tool, like our plan of eating, may vary widely among members and may need to be adjusted as we progress in our recovery.

For example, a newcomer's action plan might focus on planning, shopping for and preparing food. Some members may need a regular fitness routine to improve strength and health, while others may need to set exercise limits in order to attain more balance. Some of us may need an action plan that includes time for meditation and relaxation or provides strategies for balancing work, personal interactions with family and friends, and our program. Others may need help to organize their homes; deal with their finances; and address medical, dental or mental health issues.

Along with working the Steps on a daily basis, an action plan may incorporate use of the other OA tools to bring structure, balance and manageability into our lives. As we use this tool, we find that we develop a feeling of serenity and continue to grow emotionally and spiritually while we make measurable progress one day at a time.