

## Quitting

Someone close to you has come to Overeaters Anonymous and decided to quit overeating. It may not seem like a big decision at first, but it is of major consequence. Many of us know smokers who have stopped smoking, alcoholics who have stopped drinking and other groups of people who have “quit.”

The difference in all these groups of quitters is that they never have to drink alcohol or smoke or gamble or take drugs again. This is not so with the overeater, who cannot quit eating altogether. Due to the gravity of the commitment made by the compulsive overeater to stop, an important question arises within the overeater's family: “As family members how are we involved?”

## Who Needs to Change?

The answer is that family involvement is an individual choice. Some families join the overeater in his or her new eating plan. Others do not. There are families that read OA literature and openly discuss it, while some have never even seen it.

These matters should be determined primarily by the OA member's personal inclinations. In the beginning, some members are not ready to share their program of recovery with non-compulsive overeaters, even loved ones. Later, they may join the ranks of those who enthusiastically recruit family members to the OA way of life.

The only one who has to change is the person who wishes to stop overeating. In this quest, new attitudes and outlooks are necessary. All that is asked of the family during this period is patience and acceptance.

## Changes Mean Growth

The abstaining overeater is changing his behavior in an attempt to restore his good health and create a feeling of well-being. A person who feels good about himself and what he is doing is usually able to maintain satisfactory relationships with family, friends and other people.

OA helps people feel good about themselves. One of the first tools used to encourage this feeling is abstinence (to refrain from compulsive overeating).

From this beginning in OA, a new person emerges—one who uses the other tools of the OA program to

reinforce these newfound feelings of well-being and self-worth.

Many overeaters have spent so much time despairing that feelings of self-esteem and well-being have become alien to them. Therefore, to restore these vital elements of “sobriety,” the compulsive overeater must learn to respond in new ways to some of the problems that arise within the family.

It may seem strange to hear statements such as, “I have to do what is right for me” or “That isn't my problem.” But family members are usually able to overcome negative reactions when they realize that these responses are helping to build a sense of self-worth in the overeater.

## Unfamiliar Behavior

At the same time that these sometimes puzzling changes are occurring, frequent telephone calls begin to interrupt family meals and other activities. Meetings sometimes take up a great deal of the overeater's time as he or she seeks to recover.

To the family, the frequent absences and preoccupations of the compulsive overeater may be perplexing or downright annoying. Unfamiliar behavior and attitudes may cause anger and resentment toward OA, which may be seen as the culprit responsible for the change.

But the OA member is changing; he is changing not only because of the program, but because he is no longer eating to pacify suppressed feelings—feelings that are now coming out into the open.

Sometimes the opposite occurs, and the compulsive overeater who comes into Overeaters Anonymous experiences what is termed a “spiritual awakening.” This enables him to abstain quickly and effortlessly, usually experiencing great joy and serenity as a result of surrender of his will. These individuals report great improvement in all their relationships, especially with family members.

It should be remembered, however, that many OA members do not have this experience and therefore must work at changing their lives through dealing with difficult and long-repressed feelings right from the start.

## Cooperation Is Crucial

Thus, the family of the OA member are most needed when they seem to feel least wanted or “pushed out.” At this critical point in the compulsive overeater's recovery, the family can help immensely by being understanding, cooperative and patient.

It's important to understand that all these disruptive and inconvenient new interests—telephone calls, meetings, catch phrases—are necessary to move the OA member forward on the road to recovery.

There may come a time when the intensity of these commitments will lessen, but the compulsive overeater can't be hurried. OA is not a diet club. It is a way of life to be practiced one day at a time. This is the only assurance against relapse.

OA members do not love their families less. On the contrary, they wish to love everyone more. A fundamental concept in OA is that unless the compulsive overeater learns to love himself, he is incapable of loving anyone else.

## Self-Image

Overeating and a poor self-image seem to go together. The only way to stop disliking oneself is to start liking oneself. But how does one change such deep-seated and often unconscious feelings?

OA offers a Twelve-Step program of recovery as the one sure way to do this. We believe that such a radical change in self-image can take place only if one makes a vigorous effort to practice these Steps. This effort is simplified by the newly attained but strongly held conviction that “*Just for today*, I can abstain; I can let go of the self-destructive tendencies; and I can grasp a new manner of living.”

Underlying all our actions is the single most important concept in OA: that of personal powerlessness over our compulsion. The OA member admits that his efforts thus far have failed; he surrenders totally his self-will, and asks for help in making a new beginning.

It is very important for the compulsive overeater to do this voluntarily; he must be allowed the dignity of choosing whether or not to make the OA program his path to recovery. This is the greatest service the family can render along with the members of the Fellowship.

## We Care

When the overeater reaches out to OA, he finds other compulsive overeaters ready to take his hand. He experiences the solid reality of the simple statement that “we care.” We really do!

The first OA person the compulsive overeater’s family encounters is usually a sponsor. Who is this person who has the absolute attention of the overeater? Why is this new name suddenly brought into family conversations morning, noon and night?

A sponsor is a port in a storm—the storm of physical cravings and uncomfortable feelings experienced by some compulsive overeaters during the first weeks of abstinence.

First a source of program information, later a confidant and finally a friend, the sponsor is the overeater’s direct link to the program. Based on what he has experienced during his own abstinence, the sponsor holds out strength and hope to the new member when everything else seems confusing and threatening. The sponsor makes a commitment to be there when he is needed.

## To the Family

The compulsive overeater’s obsession with food has adverse effects not only on the victim of the disease, but on the rest of the family as well. As the newly abstaining OA member recovers and grows, it is not unusual for family members to become uncomfortable with the transformation. They may actually decide that they prefer the old overeater—fat and all—to this person whose interests are no longer confined to home, family and food.

It is not unnatural to feel a bit left out and resentful of all this newfound independence. These feelings, however, are clearly a reflection of the unhealthy influence of compulsive overeating on the victim’s family.

## The Twelve 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.

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



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# THE FAMILY OF THE COMPULSIVE OVEREATER

*Family involvement  
is an individual  
choice . . .*

