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# Compulsive overeating— an inside view

## *Introduction*

The following passage describes how compulsive overeaters experience the various manifestations of compulsive overeating. The passage was excerpted from the book, *The Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous*, and is offered here to professionals, newcomers, and other interested persons who desire to know more about us and our behavior.

## *An inside view*

When we look with complete honesty at our lives, we see that where eating is concerned we have acted in an extremely irrational and self-destructive manner. Under the compulsion to overeat, many of us have done things no sane person would think of doing. We have driven miles in the dead of night to satisfy a craving for food. We have eaten food that was frozen, burnt, stale, or even dangerously spoiled. We have eaten off of other people's plates, off the floor, off the ground. We have dug food out of the garbage and eaten it.

We have frequently lied about what we have eaten—lied to others because we didn't want to face the truth ourselves. We have stolen food from our friends, family, and employers, as well as from the grocery store. We have also stolen money to buy food. We have eaten beyond the point of being full, beyond the point of being sick of eating. We have continued to overeat, knowing

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all the while we were disfiguring and maiming our bodies. We have isolated ourselves to eat, damaging our relationships and denying ourselves a full social life. For the sake of our compulsive eating, we have turned ourselves into objects of ridicule and we have destroyed our health.

Then, horrified by what we were doing to ourselves with food, we became obsessed with diets. We spent hundreds of dollars on weight-loss schemes, we bought all sorts of appetite-control drugs, we joined diet clubs and spas, we had ourselves hypnotized and analyzed, we had major surgery on our digestive systems, we had our ears stapled or our jaws wired shut. All of this we did willingly, hoping we could someday “have our cake and eat it too.”

Some of us went from doctor to doctor looking for a cure. The doctors gave us diets, but we had no better success with those than with the other diets we'd been on. The doctors gave us shots and pills. Those worked for a while, but we inevitably lost control and overate again, putting back on the weight we had worked so hard to lose.

Many of us tried fasting, with and without a doctor's supervision. Usually we lost weight, but as soon as we started eating again, the compulsive eating behavior returned, along with the weight. Some of us learned to purge ourselves with vomiting, laxatives, or excessive exercise. We'd stuff food in our mouths until we were in physical pain, then we'd “get rid of it.” We damaged our digestive systems and our teeth while we starved our bodies of nutrients needed to live.

Those of us who were overweight got plenty of advice from others about how to get to our

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“ideal” size, but nothing permanently solved our problem. We found that no matter what we did to ease our turmoil, our compulsive eating eventually returned. Over the long haul, our weight went up and our self-esteem went down. After a while we became battle-weary and discouraged. Still, we could never accept our powerlessness. The prospect of being obese, sick, and out of control for the rest of our lives led some of us to conclude that life was simply not worth living. Many of us thought about suicide. Some of us tried it.

Most of us, however, never reached suicidal desperation. Instead we took comfort in a feeling that everything was all right as long as we got enough to eat. The only trouble was that as our compulsive eating progressed it became harder for us to get enough. Instead of bringing comfort, the overeating backfired. The more we ate the more we suffered, yet we continued to overeat. Our true insanity could be seen in the fact that we kept right on trying to find comfort in excess food, long after it began to cause us misery.

Once we honestly looked at our lives, it became easy for us to admit we had acted insanely where food and weight were concerned. Many of us, however, were able to confine our compulsive eating to the hours when we were alone and to carry on with relatively normal lives. We worked hard during the day and ate hard at night. Surely we were sane in most respects.

More self-examination revealed many areas in which our lives were out of balance. We had to admit that we had not acted sanely when we responded to our children's needs for attention by yelling at them, or when we were jealously possessive of our mates. Too much of the time we had lived in fear and anxiety. More comfortable

with food than with people, we sometimes limited our social lives. We drew the drapes, disconnected the telephone, and hid in the house.

When we were around other people, we smiled and agreed when we really wanted to say no. Some of us were unable to stand up for ourselves in abusive relationships; we felt we deserved the abuse. Or we focused on others' faults and thought for hours about what they should do to solve their problems, while our own problems went unsolved.

Compulsive overeaters are often people of extremes. We overreacted to slight provocations while ignoring the real issues in our lives. We were obsessively busy, then we were "wiped out" and unable to act. We were wildly excited then deeply depressed. We saw the whole world in black and white. If we couldn't have it all, we didn't want any; if we couldn't be the best, we didn't want to play the game.

Little by little, we saw how much pain our way of living was causing us. Gradually, we came to believe we needed to change.

### ***There is help***

If you can identify with the description in this pamphlet, we will welcome you. If you know of someone who might benefit from this program, suggest that he or she contact Overeaters Anonymous.

### ***How to find OA***

There are Overeaters Anonymous groups in most cities and towns throughout the United States, as well as other countries. For local meeting information, look in the phone directory white pages under Overeaters Anonymous. For worldwide meeting information, contact the World Service Office. Request our free catalog for a complete selection of OA literature.

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# **COMPULSIVE OVEREATING — AN INSIDE VIEW**

*The various manifestations  
of compulsive overeating*

