



Food Freedom

A Resource Manual
for Secular Overeaters

FIRST EDITION



Preface

Dear Secular Overeaters,

We heard you! Here is a resource manual to help atheists, agnostics and other secular/non-religious folks in our recovery from compulsive food behaviors.

In the tradition of Overeaters Anonymous (OA), a group of us individual secular members have come up with this resource manual to help us as individuals in our recovery.

This is not OA conference-approved literature. For such literature, please go to OA.org. Since it is not conference-approved, please do not share this manual during OA meetings. You can share it during the socializing period after an OA meeting, just as we share all kinds of advice. This is for sharing one-on-one with other individuals in and out of OA.

If you want to find other OA meetings for folks like us, just go to OA.org and use the drop down menu under

“Special Focus” for “Atheist/Agnostic/Secular.” You can also find these meetings and unregistered OA meetings at secularovereaters.org. We would love to meet you and support you in your recovery. Since 2020, we began expanding the number of meetings for our constituency via Zoom, and we have been welcoming lots of secular newcomers and other seculars returning to OA after a break. However, there have not been enough secular sponsors to go around. To help meet that need, we have come up with some new approaches.

First, we set up our Monday Work-shops with Secular sponsors. For about a year, we invited a different secular OA sponsor to speak each week about a practice that helps in their recovery. We generated lots of podcasts. That Monday meeting still functions with a focus on helping folks who don't have sponsors (meets 9am PT / Noon ET / 5pm UK). You can find it at OA.org. However, it no longer has a



live secular sponsor speaking every week, but it's still a great meeting.

We also launched a Sponsorship Initiative to grow new sponsors. If you are interested in becoming a secular sponsor, please check out the two-page handout we developed:

[SecularOvereaters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SO-BSS-09152021.pdf](https://www.secularovereaters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SO-BSS-09152021.pdf)

We have encouraged the use of peer-based approaches, such as secular accountability buddies and secular recovery circles. These are both described in this manual.

This manual provides you with a guide to dozens of the practices described by secular sponsors in our Monday workshops and many others besides. It is the easiest way for a secular overeater to learn about these practices. You can use it on your own, with a buddy, in a recovery circle—or as a new sponsor with your sponsees. As you read through each chapter, you will find sections with resources that

will point you to podcasts and links to websites.

We hope this manual will help you get and stay abstinent. Writing it sure did help us!

Sincerely,

The Literature Initiative



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Chapter 1: Introduction

We welcome you as a “Secular Overeater.”

Let’s take a look at those two words one at a time.

We are overeaters, and many of us are members of the larger community of Overeaters Anonymous (OA.) Like everyone in OA, we struggle for freedom from the bondage of compulsions around food and eating, which can also include other unhealthy food behaviors like anorexia, bulimia, bingeing or overexercising . The home page for OA is OA.org.

However, we are secular meaning that we are not religious. We do not believe in God, or a non-material being or other mystical entity who will intervene in our lives and help us stop overeating. By contrast, many other members of OA do hold those beliefs. As a consequence, much of the literature and many OA meetings emphasize God. If you have similar beliefs or non-beliefs to us secular

overeaters or simply prefer a more secular approach, we welcome you.

Like most of us in OA, we use the word “abstinence” to describe that freedom around food. Together, we have lost thousands of pounds. Many of us have stopped overeating, obsessing, fad diets, bingeing, purging, restricting, medication, and other extreme behaviors around food for long periods of time—decades even! We have tried all those, including surgery, and more. In a real sense, since being in OA, we have made peace with food.

We help each other to eat rationally so that, if we choose to, we can move towards and/or maintain a desired, healthy body weight.

If you start attending one or more secular OA meetings by Zoom or by phone and follow the simple suggestions in this manual, it is likely that you too can change

your relationship with food and eating. You can, if you want, reach your preferred body size and maintain it—without any extreme or dangerous actions and without obsessing mentally—and live a better, fuller life. You too, can make peace with food.

As a peer-support community, there are no professionals in OA. No one is seeking to make a living from doing this work, much less a profit. As a result, like most peer support communities, also known as mutual aid or self-help groups, there is no cost. If you do find this group useful, we will ask you to contribute as makes sense, both financially and as a volunteer. Food freedom is essentially free!

As individuals, most of us have experience within the larger Overeaters Anonymous (OA) community. You may have found us through OA. You may be a current member of OA. Almost all of us are. You may have considered, or have already tried, Overeaters Anonymous in the past and are returning because you have heard about this secular option. Or you may be brand new to OA and, like most of us in OA, have tried everything else and have finally turned to OA. Like Alcoholics

Anonymous (AA) on which we and the rest of OA are based, OA is for many of us “the last house on the block.”

Here is a [15 question quiz](#) to help you decide if you have compulsive food behaviors and, by extension, whether it is worth putting a lot of time and effort into OA.

If you think you are one of us, welcome.

All of the secular 12 Step communities have grown significantly during the pandemic. Since we are, so far, a scattered minority within OA, we have been able to find ourselves on the internet as all meetings shifted to online. In just a year, from 2020 to 2021, we have grown from 6 secular meetings in OA to 21, with the founders of meetings coming from all over the world . You can go to [OA.org](#) or:

[secularovereaters.org](#)

to join any one of our meetings by Zoom and get to know us.

Before we describe the resources in this manual, we would like to give you some of the perspectives we have developed along the way.

Our Perspective

1. There is no one way to stop compulsive eating.

Each person must figure out an action plan and a food plan for themselves, ideally working with others in our program, including at least some people with more experience and success.

2. This is a scientific, empirical process.

The 12 Steps of recovery in OA were largely borrowed from AA including the many references to God in the Steps and their supporting literature. AA in turn drew inspiration from a 1930s religious group. Millions have used the basic 12 Steps successfully to deal with a host of addictions to various substances and processes. For the OA and Freethinker versions of the 12 Steps, check the Important References at the end of this manual. Some of us may find that looking for ways to take the 12 Steps and alter or re-word them may be helpful, for others it is not. There are two words that stand out over everything we have heard and seen, and they are:

whatever works. We come to OA because our eating harms us, and anything that reduces or eliminates the harmful eating is our goal. Thus, whatever works.

3. The 12 Steps are only one approach and need not be undertaken immediately.

In this manual, we have attempted to extract the aspects of the traditional OA experience most helpful to secular overeaters and augment them with additional resources. OA and AA anchor recovery to a sequence of actions numbered one to twelve. These Steps are the core tenets of recovery in these programs. Some of us have dealt with addictions within OA and other 12 Step programs without ever having completed or even started the 12 Steps. Working the Steps is something you can discuss with your sponsor. It is not uncommon for newcomers to focus on finding social support in meetings and with a sponsor, developing a food plan, and eating rationally for some time before undertaking the rigorous program of personal improvement of the 12 Steps. Working the Steps is something you can discuss with your sponsor or therapist.

The 12 Steps include basic tools from the Christian traditions which many of us do find helpful to our recovery regardless of our religious beliefs or lack of them. Steps 4 and 5 direct us to conduct a moral inventory, a process of deep personal introspection and sharing the results of that process with another person. Steps 6 and 7 ask us to take a deeper look at our character defaults (often called defects or, more positively, traits which allowed us to survive, but can cause us problems). Steps 8 and 9 extend that self-examination to all our relationships, followed by making amends to all the people in our lives whom we have harmed—a form of what might nowadays be called restorative justice. In the listing of tools later in the book, we list all the 12 Steps. For many of us, the Steps are vital to maintaining our continued rationality around food. However, it does not have to come first, nor need you ever use any of them. Indeed, many of us seek personal improvement through professional therapy, or other self-help groups.

4. We only know a little.

This manual lays out our current experiences and insights into what secular members of OA have found to work. That said, we know only

a little and our goal is to grow our knowledge. We invite you to join us.

5. Meeting with other secular overeaters, like OA itself, is a gateway.

We are also well aware that the way we use food may be linked to various adverse experiences from our past (e.g., childhood abuse or life traumas), as well as current life circumstances (e.g., health conditions, family life or work life). For many of us, meeting with other secular overeaters, like the rest of OA, is a gateway to other support we may need for issues beyond how we eat. Some of this may come from the OA fellowship and tools. Sometimes our sponsor or other members of OA will refer us to other sources of support outside OA that they have found helpful.

We are not therapists, doctors, career counselors, or experts on any aspect of life. We are simply a fellowship of people who have found that working together helps many of us make progress toward a better way to eat and live.

6. Progress is perfection.

Freedom from compulsive food behaviors is often a process of

making progress over time. With alcohol, the goal in AA is simple and absolute: completely stopping. Food is quite different. Most of us will have rough edges around our compulsion. Did I stuff myself with healthy food (e.g., vegetables)? Should I eat more slowly? Am I eating because I'm hungry, or am I tired, stressed, or bored? We may be adjusting our action plan and food plan all our lives.

will go back at different times in your recovery and include other practices or make changes in how you use each at different times.

7. Most of us need an action plan.

While everyone is different, as noted above, many of us have found it important to develop our own personal action plan to help us avoid our compulsive behavior and thinking. In Chapter 2, we describe action plans.

As we reviewed what has worked for us in our action plans, we found it useful to divide our action plans into four categories: Social Support, Food Plan, Self-Help, and Service. We discuss each of these categories in their own Chapters 3-6.

We have listed these in an order that many of us have found helpful, but you may decide to jump in anywhere. No matter where you begin, it is likely that you



Chapter 2: Action Plan

We all have an action plan when we decide to lose weight or make some change in our behavior around food. It may be as simple as a diet someone recommended, a vague notion that maybe we won't eat desserts, or that we'll bring a main course we can eat to a potluck.

We respect the fact that each of us is different and needs our own individualized approach. With that general caveat, here are some general considerations we would suggest based on our experience.

Put it in writing.

Most of us have found it useful to put our decisions about food into writing. In many traditions, there is a saying that if you don't have a plan in writing, then you don't have a plan. It is rarely more elaborate than a single sheet of paper or computer file, with a few notes on it. You can change it as often as needed.

Include the four basics:

In general, we recommend that you include one or more elements from each of the major categories many secular overeaters have found useful. These categories are presented in detail in each of the following chapters: Social Support, a Food Plan, Self-care and Service. For now, we'll give a quick overview of these four categories so you can get a feel for what your action plan might look like. The chapters include lots more elements for you to consider in each category. You can be very simple or very detailed. We will discuss both approaches below before suggesting that you jot down your first action plan.

Social Support (Chapter 3)

Most of us have found that some form of social support is necessary. The easiest way to find social support is to come to one of our Zoom meetings. As noted in the Introduction, you can find most of our secular meetings on [OA.org](https://www.oa.org) under the Special Focus: Atheist/

Agnostic/Secular. Unregistered meetings, ones that use outside literature, are also listed on secularovereaters.org.

The meetings are all free to newcomers. Once you become a regular member, you may be asked to consider a contribution of \$5 to help defray operational expenses like Zoom fees or rent (this is called the 7th Tradition), but there are no fees for membership.

The meetings usually last an hour. While you are attending the meeting, put your contact information in the Chat and identify yourself as a newcomer, and you can ask for an outreach call. Most of our meetings have a socialization period on Zoom after the meeting where you can ask questions. Sometimes, a volunteer member of the meeting will introduce themselves as the newcomer greeter and offer to call or text you. Other meetings have a weekly caller who will contact people who ask for a call. Whether you want contact is always up to you.

Click on this link and Secular Overeaters will send you a free newcomers kit:
<https://secularovereaters.org/so-newcomers/>

You may go to one or many meetings before deciding to reach out to another human being. At some point, you will probably identify one or more fellow compulsive eaters you feel more comfortable with and have begun to communicate with, if only superficially.

If you are lucky, you will connect with a secular sponsor who is taking on sponsees. Sponsors will provide support as you go through this manual, the 12 Steps, or other materials.

However, most of our secular meetings are relatively new, so there are not enough secular sponsors. We have been developing other approaches to social support, such as accountability buddies and recovery circles. Or you may prefer more informal sources of social support. All of these and others are described in Chapter 3.

We put social support first in this manual because of its importance.

Food Plan (Chapter 4)

Next, your action plan should include a food plan. A food plan lists the changes you would like to make in your attitudes and

behavior around food. Your food plan may be simple or detailed. Discuss it with other people including some of us with longer periods of eating rationally (what we call abstinence). Your food plan can be as simple as “no yellow cake with chocolate frosting”—especially if you have been eating one every day! Don’t worry about getting it perfect. You will probably change it many times in the future.

The “A New Plan of Eating” available from the [OA Bookstore](#) lists nine different food plans you might consider. Many of us also consult a nutritionist. Go to Chapter 4, Food Plan for more information.

Most of us do not do well with impromptu plans and can get into trouble when we open the refrigerator or arrive at the counter of a fast food joint. Or going shopping without a list.

The chapter on Food Plan provides more suggestions and refers you to podcasts by two secular sponsors discussing their approach to food plans.

Self-care (Chapter 5)

Self-care is things we can do by ourselves like exercising, meditating, and journaling.

Service (Chapter 6)

Service is what we can do to help other compulsive eaters including serving as a sponsor, accountability buddy, member of a recovery circle, or holding a position at a meeting.

Other Considerations

Here are some other consideration for creating an action plan:

- **Ability.** What can you reasonably do based on your life, schedule, financial resources, and family constraints (e.g., young children, aging parents).
- **Current motivation.** This may change. For example, if you become more desperate around food or, alternatively, experience success.
- **Desired outcomes.** For instance, giving up refined carbs will lead toward more weight loss and reducing sugar might affect diabetes, blood sugar, etc.
- **Self-evaluation.** Another key may be what science calls measurement and evaluation, though we might call it inventory. Am I getting the outcomes I desire and to what extent? If not, do I change the mix? This blends some

of our OA culture with the science of habit formation. For more on that aspect of science, go to the website of Stanford's Professor B.J. Fogg (tinyhabits.com).

- **Desired support.** How much support do you want? Note that some of your decisions may be informed by social support. Other times it may be based on your own judgment. Your sponsor may suggest a fairly complete list—or leave it up to your discretion.
- **Science of addiction.** The more we read the growing science of addiction, nutrition and behavior change, the more we will benefit.
- **Pre-formulated action plans.** At least one non-secular community in OA prescribes a very detailed action plan (although they do not call it that). That community is named HOW, for “honest, open, and willing,” based on a quote from the Big Book (<https://how-oa.org>). It is a very disciplined sub-community; part of HOW remains inside OA and part went outside. It prescribes a specific, no-sugar-and-no-refined-flour food plan and specific actions to take each day: call your sponsor every morning, read them the answer to one of thirty questions,

make three outreach calls, and more. It provides accountability, time patterns, repetition, cultural support and validation (e.g., candle ceremony for anniversary and sponsors).

- **Trial and error.** As we work the program, we look for progress and ask ourselves is this working for me (whatever works)? Am I making progress? Is this a win for me, today? Based on the answers to those questions, we may find we now have a solution and our goal is to maintain it as an ongoing part of our action plan. If it does not work, or stops working and begins to degrade or relapse, then we refine our process till we find what does. As noted earlier, we don't claim to be the answer for everyone, secular or otherwise. In fact, most of us would say that while OA has helped us reduce our harmful eating, so have a variety of other things.

A quote that is attributed to Thomas Edison captures the spirit of refining your action plan over and over very well: “Using candles and oil lamps causes fires and nasty smoke. I want a world with light and safety. Let's try some other ways to make light.” After 1200 attempts, Edison learned

about tungsten in a near-vacuum. Some years later, someone said something else might work even better. When it comes to food problems, we are still burning candles.

Here is what one secular sponsor has to say about an action plan.

We will be suggesting podcasts throughout this manual. It would be good to get in the habit by listening to this first one.

Resources

Podcast: Action Plans

The presenter, Rachel talks about how to create and use action plans to support our well-being and growth. The session includes a role play and answers to audience questions. Recorded on 12/28/20.

[Recording](#) (33 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

Now it's time for you to write your first action plan

You can fill out the following form now and revise it as you read through this manual. Good luck!

(see next page)

My Action Plan

Date: _____

Here is what I will do daily and the times I will do them:

Social Support:

Food Plan:

Self-care:

Service:

Here is what I will do each week:

Social Support:

Food Plan:

Self-care:

Service:

Here is what I will do each month:

Social Support:

Food Plan:

Self-care:

Service:

Here is what I will do less frequently (quarterly, annually):

Social Support:

Food Plan:

Self-care:

Service:

Here is what I hope my action plan will grow into over time:

Social Support:

Food Plan:

Self-care:

Service:



Chapter 3: Social Support

When we overeaters are alone, we are in bad company. Compulsive over or undereating is a disease of isolation. Most of us require the help of others to recover, even if it is just someone to exchange phone calls or texts.

Social support is what we get from other secular overeaters in our OA community. It's the first action we take—reaching out to another human being or going to a meeting.

For context, there are two tendencies in 12 Step Fellowships, like AA and OA. Some of us rely heavily on literature and the more spiritual path described there. This approach is associated with Bill W. and the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous). The other is more social. We find meetings, relationships, and the tips we pick up from other members to be the more important aspects of the program. This second tendency is associated with Jim B. who helped Bill W. write the Big Book. The AA book, *Living Sober*, is a wonderful

collection of tips that are useful for dealing with any addiction including compulsive eating.

This chapter describes a variety of sources of social support (e.g., meetings, sponsors, accountability buddies, and recovery circles) and resources to help you get started to identify sources of social support for yourself, even if it is only one person you call or text regularly. You do not need to do this alone!

Here is a partial listing of the sources of social support you might include in your first action plan.

3A. Go to Meetings

For most of us, attending meetings was our first OA action. Indeed, for some, going to meetings constitutes our entire program. There are no qualifications to attend a meeting. The only requirement for membership in OA is a desire to stop eating compulsively. This is the easiest and most reliable source of social support.

Every newcomer should attend one or more meetings each week. Some common wisdom states, “Three meetings a week is a good program, two meetings a week is a good effort, and one meeting a week—good luck!” Of course, the only real answer is how many meetings it takes for you to get and remain abstinent.

Some newcomers or those struggling with relapse decide to attend 90 meetings in 90 days or 30 meetings in 30 days. Others may only go to one or two meetings a week, but have more frequent contact with a sponsor, co-sponsor, or buddy.

You can find meetings at OA.org (select “Atheist/Agnostic/Secular” under the “Special Focus” menu) and on the secular website secularovereaters.org

These days many meetings are online via Zoom and all the secular meetings meet on Zoom or by phone. Meetings typically last for an hour and are free.

Listen to what others with similar problems are doing and jot down a few notes. Copy some phone numbers shared and talk with other members as you develop your

action plan. Make a special note of people you like or who have problems similar to yours.

At most OA meetings, there is a We Care List in which attendees who would like to connect with others share their names (first name and first letter of last name), contact information (typically a phone number or email), and a request for what they’d like (e.g., an outreach call or looking for an accountability buddy). Some attendees will indicate if they are a sponsor or seeking a sponsor.

For in-person meetings, the We Care List is typically a sheet of paper that is passed around the room. Many online meetings use the Chat function in Zoom. Others have a sheet online that the meeting maintains from week-to-week, usually with strict limitations on its use. At the end of online meetings, you can save the Chat file, so you have a list of fellows who are willing to take a phone call or email. Reach out to them and ask questions. Or post a request for someone to call you. We all know how difficult it is to make that first phone call. There is a name for this problem in OA—the “800 pound telephone.”

If you don't have a computer, you can access Zoom meetings by phone. For over a decade, one of the largest secular-friendly meetings, "Unconventional Spirituality," has been meeting only by phone on Sundays (7am PT / 10am ET / 5pm UK).

You can also reach out via email to our Google Group and ask for a newcomer greeter. To join the group, send an email to:

secular overeaters.community@gmail.com.

Resources

Meetings: See the "Atheist/Agnostic/Secular" option under "Special Focus" on OA.org or go to the Meetings tabs on secularovereaters.org

to find meetings and for information about how to start a new meeting.

Newcomer Packet: Go to <https://bit.ly/SOnewcomer> to request the OA brochure "Where do I start?" and optional secular materials (both free).

3B. Find a Sponsor

A sponsor is someone who is willing to share their "experience, strength, and hope" with you. Often, the most important

thing sponsors do is provide compassionate, non-directive listening and take the time to see your life from your perspective. Some may share their food or action plans to give you ideas. Most of us do better with sponsors, no matter how long we have been in OA.

So how do you find a sponsor? As noted above, We Care Lists are an important avenue for sponsors to identify themselves and say whether they are taking on new sponsees. Most sponsors will always take phone calls, especially from newcomers. Many is the sponsee who started off with informal phone calls to a sponsor only to have the conversations blossom into a formal sponsoring relationship. And don't feel that you need to stay with a sponsor if the relationship is not working for you. The important thing is to find someone who is a good match for you at this point in time. Conversely, there are not a lot of available secular sponsors, so you may need to work with a more traditional sponsor in the beginning. And, many traditional sponsors are supportive of secular people.

If someone in a meeting is not listed as a sponsor, but you like

what they have to say, give them a call. Anyone can sponsor up to the level of their experience. Whatever the length of their abstinence, or even less, they can listen to you and tell you what has worked for them.

Resources

Podcast: Secular Sponsoring

The presenter, Vini T explains her approach to sponsoring, both as a sponsor and a sponsee. Recorded on 11/30/20.

[Recording](#) (19 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

Link: [Finding a Sponsor](#)

This resource covers sponsors, their role, how to find one, sponsor interview questions, and quotes from sponsees about their sponsors.

Link: [Sponsoring a Secular Member](#)

This resource has information about secular sponsor workshops, OA sponsoring resources (not secular), and books and other materials to support a secular approach. It also includes quotes from sponsors.

Link: [Sponsorship Kit](#)

A set of pamphlets from the OA Bookstore are available for \$5. Get a free copy of OA's "A Guide

for Sponsors" and a print copy of Secular Sponsoring Resources: [Secular Sponsor Kit](#).

3C. Seek Sponsors for Limited Roles

Sponsorship does not have to be all or nothing. Someone who is just starting out as a sponsor, can serve as an accountability sponsor for a newcomer. This would be appropriate for a member who wants to check in daily or weekly about how well they are doing with their abstinence or food plan. People can also be food sponsors; this would be someone you would send your daily food plan to (either before or after you eat). Another example is a gratitude sponsor, with whom a member can share their gratitude list. Again, this could be daily or weekly. In all of these cases, your sponsor could even be a relative newcomer, with no special knowledge of OA or the Steps.

If you cannot find a sponsor, there are a number of peer-based alternatives. Co-sponsors are described here, followed by buddies and peer support groups in the next two sections (3D and 3E.)

Co-sponsoring is widely used in OA and other 12-Step fellowships. In this model, two members, often with roughly comparable levels of experience, agree to serve as sponsors for each other. Together, they can work through any of the secular or traditional books, workbooks, or pamphlets.

Two newcomers working as co-sponsors could go through this manual or the [First Twelve Days](#) pamphlet from the OA website.

3D. Find Accountability Buddies

Buddies, a more limited version of co-sponsoring, is also common in OA and other 12-Step programs. It is more widely used by secular overeaters due to the relative shortage of sponsors. Typically, a buddy takes on just a single sponsoring role (e.g., accountability or compassionate listener). For example, you could serve as an accountability buddy for a member who agrees to call before they engage in particular food behaviors (e.g., eating in the middle of the night or eating ice cream after dinner). Indeed, a compassionate listener accountability buddy is one of the most powerful tools in the

wider peer-support world.

One way to do this is for two people to meet, divide the time available, and listen to each other in confidence without interrupting or offering advice. This is basically an expanded version of 3-minute shares at OA meetings, with the added understanding that people may deal with difficult subjects and express strong feelings!

You can also simply take timed turns telling each other your life stories. It is good to include early memories about food, your eating history, your experiences to date with OA, and your current abstinence, including places where you struggle.

Resources

Podcast: Accountability Buddies

A [recording](#) and [written resources](#) about accountability buddies.

3E. Join or Start a Specialized Peer Support Group

Recovery Circles

In part to address a current shortage of secular sponsors, some individuals in the secular OA community have encouraged the formation of peer support groups

called recovery circles, small groups of three to six people who commit to meet on a regular basis to promote their recovery.

Resources

Recovery Circles

Links to a [handout](#) and audio recording on secularovereaters.org [Recording](#) (12 minutes)

Podcast: Group Support

The presenter, Alan, shares different models of group support, including recovery circles. Recorded on 12/21/20.

[Recording](#) (31 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

Relapse Prevention Support Groups

Relapse Prevention Support Groups consist of members who meet regularly to provide help and accountability to one another to prevent relapses. There are predictable warning signs that precede a relapse. For example, changes in how you are approaching the OA program (e.g., decreased meeting attendance), food (e.g., not following your food plan closely), or how you are feeling emotionally (e.g., anxiety or depression). Here is a presentation on this approach. The presenter, Alan, discusses the four

warning signs of relapse and offers suggestions for recovery.

Resources

Podcast: Relapse Prevention

Sponsor Alan talks through four warning signs of relapse (OA Program, Physical, Emotional/Spiritual, and Life Triggers) and offers suggestions for recovery. Recorded on 3/29/21.

[Recording](#) (23 minutes)

Handout: [Relapse Prevention Support Group Workshop](#)

3F. Improve Your Listening Skills

Arguably, the most important thing an OA sponsor or peer can do is listen. So often we already have our own solutions to problems that emerge as we talk and express feelings that might lead us to overeat.

All of the social structures described above—meetings, sponsoring, and various types of peer-to-peer support—rely on members being good listeners.

Suggested Practice: Once a week, do a longer meeting with another member to learn to use listening as a way to deal with emotions. Begin with a half hour and increase to

two hours. Divide the time. Begin with your life stories. What is going on in your life now? Does it remind you of past experiences? Allow yourself to express feelings, even deep ones.

Resources

Podcast: Listening Tools

The presenter, Jim D, and workshop participants share ideas for being a good listener as an OA sponsor or peer. Recorded 1/4/21.

[Recording](#) (27 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

3G. Join or Start a Study Group

A study group is a group of people who have chosen to get together with the purpose of studying something—such as the 12 Steps or a particular book or workbook or this manual—in a methodical way, usually with an ongoing and regular meeting.

Resources

Podcast: Study Groups

The presenter, Rachel, talks about how to integrate various kinds of study groups, such as book groups or Step groups into a recovery program. Recorded on 3/15/21.

[Recording](#) (25 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

[Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide, Second Edition:](#)

An in-depth resource for taking groups or individual sponsees on a journey through OA's Twelve Steps to a Life of Recovery (includes leader scripts, worksheets, and readings).

[The Twelve Step Workbook, Second Edition:](#) This workbook is composed of questions based on OA's keystone book, The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition.

[Exploring Abstinence through Writing: A Draft Workbook to Try Out](#) A workbook that reflects the experiences, strengths, and hopes of members of Overeaters Anonymous in Northern Virginia.

3H. Attend a Workshop

OA schedules frequent workshops and events. For more information, see [Virtual Region of Overeaters Anonymous](#).

Secular Overeaters organizes secular workshops on topics like Secular Sponsoring, Ask-it Baskets, and Recovery Tools. These are announced at our secular meetings and the Secular Overeaters [Newsletter](#).

3I. Listen to Podcasts

There are several secular podcasts available that feature speakers who share their stories and wisdom to help other OA members. These podcasts are typically 20 to 30 minutes long. Here is one listing of podcasts for secular overeaters: [Podcasts](#).

3J. Electronic Outreach

Reaching out to people you don't know can sometimes feel uncomfortable, but outreach is a lifeline whether by phone, text, email, or other electronic platform. When we are triggered to reach out for our favorite food, there are few things more effective than making a phone call. Even if you don't reach your sponsor, an OA buddy, or another member, the act of making a call often breaks the spell.

Even before the pandemic, most OA support was done electronically, by phone, email, or internet. As mentioned above under 3A. Meetings, meetings use the We Care List to identify members you can call, or post your number or email to let others know you would like to be contacted. There is no need to feel uncomfortable. This is a very

common OA tool used by most members. In the presentation, linked below, the presenter, Allie, suggests that you begin by calling three people each day and talking for at least 5 minutes.

Resources

Podcast: Outreach

The presenter, Allie, shares her thoughts about how to use the phone, texting, email, or WhatsApp. Recorded on 1/11/21.

[Recording](#) (33 minutes)

Handout: [Telephone and Electronic Contact](#)

Facebook: [Secular Overeaters and Friends \(in Overeaters Anonymous\)](#)

A private non-OA Facebook group.

Google Group: Secular Overeaters Community

This online group discusses personal experiences, helpful literature, relevant events and activities, tips and techniques, and other topics related to challenges with food. To join, email:

secularovereaters.community@gmail.com (for the best experience, sign up with a Gmail account).



Chapter 4: Food Plan

The real first action for most of us is deciding what constitutes rational eating. In most other 12 Step programs, it's straightforward—you give up alcohol, drugs or toxic relationships. Food is not so simple. You cannot stop eating without jeopardizing your health, at least not for long.

Set Goals

Our primary goal is to reduce and ideally eliminate harmful ways of eating. This may involve progressive improvement over time or occur as a large shift that happens quickly. Everyone is different; it's a personal decision based on the level of improvement one desires.

Example goals from some of our members:

- Achieve a healthy weight and be at peace with food most of the time.
- Stop purging and eat in a balanced way.
- Learn to go through life with all of its challenges and not use food as a

copied mechanism.

- Be comfortable in one's own skin.

It's up to you to decide what you want to achieve. There is no right or wrong. It is about you and your relationship to how you eat.

4A. Explore Your Food and Eating Difficulties

Learn about your food and eating difficulties by examining how you are currently eating and how it harms you.

The following are areas to explore:

- Food
 - What do I eat now (eating inventory)?
 - How do I eat (e.g., compulsively, bingeing, grazing, purging, restricting)?
 - What foods or situations tend to make me lose control over my eating behavior?
- Weight
- Health (e.g., risk of heart attack, stroke, diabetes)
- Emotional (e.g., hate how I look,

self-loathing when I wake up in the morning)

- Relationships with others (e.g., family upset about my eating, weight)
- Life functioning (e.g., can't get a partner, can't go hiking, work life is suffering)

Next, consider efforts you have made in the past that haven't worked for you. These might include:

- Diets (on your own or commercial plans)
- Therapy
- Surgery
- Hypnosis
- Exercise plans

Then ask yourself in what ways you would like your food and eating to be different? What are your desired outcomes in the following areas?

- Weight (e.g., what you want to weigh).
- Health (e.g., improved blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar).
- Emotional (e.g., feel better about your body, yourself and your eating).
- Relationships with others (e.g., getting along better with family or coworkers).
- Life functioning (e.g., garden and hike, feel more comfortable dating).

4B. Develop Your Own Personal Food Plan

Now you can choose a plan of eating that will get you to your desired outcomes in a reasonable period of time. This plan will almost always change and evolve over time. The important thing is to have one.

Food plans address types of foods and/or behaviors. The word “plan” may sound rigid and formal, but it doesn't have to be. There are a range of options to fit individual needs and preferences. Here are some examples:

Give up one or more foods.

- Give up a category of foods (e.g., sugar, fast food, chips, soda).
- Make small behavior changes (e.g., no food after 8pm, no food in the car, no samples at the supermarket).
- Adhere to a meal schedules (e.g., three meals a day or three a day plus a certain number of snacks).
- Follow a detailed food plan with specific portions and choices (e.g., OA suggests several possible food plans—see “A New Plan of Eating” publication at OA.org or get a plan from your physician or nutritionist).
- Weighed and measured meals.

Some OA members like to have

support for following or being accountable for their food plans. Examples of how to do this include:

- Contact (call, text, or email) a sponsor or buddy before you eat.
- Contact a sponsor or buddy after you eat.
- Write down what you plan to or have eaten.
- Track calories.
- Track days free from certain foods and behaviors. (This is what some people mean by how long their abstinence is.)
- Ask yourself, “Am I making progress and what does that mean to me?”

Start any place you want and adjust your plan as you learn from experience what makes the most sense for you. Here are three questions to ask yourself or discuss with a sponsor or other support person:

1. Can I maintain my own plan (or close enough)?
2. Is my current food plan helping me achieve my goals (e.g., weight loss, physical health, emotional health)?
3. If either of the above is not working, what might I adjust?

Self-reflection: How much do I like to learn to do new things—a little bit at a time or all at once?

Ways to get started

1. If you like flexibility, you could work with a sponsor, other member, or a nutritionist to identify a few of your binge foods or behaviors you would like to eliminate.
2. If you are someone who benefits from a great deal of structure, you might want to try HOW meetings. HOW, which stands for honest, open, and willing, is a movement within OA. Most HOW meetings are not “god-heavy.” You can find a HOW meeting at how-oa.org.
3. In between, as noted above, OA has an excellent pamphlet “A New Plan of Eating” which offers you nine different food plans.

Resources

Brochure: [A New Plan of Eating: A Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Journey](#), (\$2 plus shipping)

Brochure: [Step One, Part One—the Allergy of the Body](#) (free, from www.oabigbook.info, which is not affiliated with Overeaters Anonymous)

Podcast: Identifying Food Behaviors and Approaches

The presenters, Allie S and Arlene O, share their different approaches to identifying problematic food

behaviors as part of defining their abstinence, followed by a general discussion of sponsorship principles. Recorded on 12/7/20).

[Recording](#) (24 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

Podcast: Developing a Food Plan

The presenters, Allie S and Arlene O, talk about how to create a food plan and share basic sample plans. Recorded on 12/14/20.

[Recording](#) (19 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)



Chapter 5: Self-Care

This chapter describes practices that other secular compulsive eaters have found helpful in their recovery. As always, individuals will differ. Working with your sponsor or another member, review these suggestions and select personal actions you will do and how often you will do them.

As you incorporate new methods of Self-care, keep track of how they are working for you. If something isn't working, make a change. Use different tools. Do more (or less). Over time, you'll find what works for you.

Self-reflection: What things do I do now to take care of myself? What are my strengths? In what areas would I like to take better care of myself?

5A. Morning Reminder

Some religious members of OA get down on their knees as soon as they wake up and reflect on the first three of the original 12 Steps, often popularized as “I can't stop.

God can. I think I'll ask God.” This type of morning reminder can be quite helpful. Indeed, the three initials H, O, and W mentioned above, parallel these Steps:

Step 1. Be honest about your problem.

Step 2. Be open to getting help.

Step 3. Be willing to follow suggestions.

Members who are secular often find their own ways to reflect on these 3 Steps each morning or as needed. For example, we might:

Step 1. Remind ourselves of past bad binges or the negative consequences of overeating such as massive weight gain, physical illness, or emotional pain for ourselves and for those we love.

Step 2. Reflect on our abstinence and remember that we have a food plan and an action plan to follow. Think about the other people you have connected with in OA.

Step 3. Decide to follow our food plan for another day. Commit to reach out for social support before taking that first compulsive bite.

5B. Literature

OA or other recovery literature is an important part of many members' programs. Like connections with other people, it provides knowledge and wisdom gained from human experience.

Although OA literature has a heavy emphasis on God, many secular people find it meaningful and helpful. There are also wonderful secular written resources from recovery programs for a variety of addictions.

Here are some of the ways that OA members use literature:

- Read something in a disciplined way every day.
- Read when unable to attend a meeting.
- Read when feeling a pull to engage in unhealthy eating behaviors.

Resources

Podcast: Literature

The presenter, Jenne, and workshop participants share examples of how to reword questions in The Twelve Step Workbook of Overeaters Anonymous to make them more relevant to secular members and share their favorite books and

other forms of literature—both OA and alternative.

Recorded on 4/5/21.

[Recording](#) (24 minutes)

Link: [Our Stories](#)

A collection of secular stories from Lifeline, an OA magazine, and from members of the OA secular community.

Link: [Book Recommendations](#)

A list of secular recommended books from the secularovereaters.org website.

Link: [Living Sober](#)

A book with simple examples of how AA members live and stay sober one day at a time, and much of it is useful for overeating as well.

5C. Writing

As noted in the [OA Tools of Recovery](#), “Putting out thoughts and feelings down on paper 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.” This might be done as part of a regular journaling practice, during Step work, or as part of a daily inventory using a specific format (see the resource “5 Inventory Formats” below).

Resources

Podcast: Writing

The presenter, Jenne, and workshop participants share a specific writing exercise and other ideas related to using the tool of writing as an OA sponsor or peer. Recorded on 1/18/21.

[Recording](#) (29 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

Handout: [5 Inventory Formats](#)

5D. Daily Inventory

Taking a daily inventory is Step 10 in the original 12. It is a basic review of how well you followed your action plan and personal improvement commitments that day. It's an opportunity to make sure you are incorporating what you have learned and gained from the program into your daily life. Elements of a review include reflecting on such things as your abstinence, your emotional state, things you did for yourself, and things you did for others. Many People consistently use a specific format for their inventory and do it at a fixed time each day (e.g., just before going to bed or upon waking).

Resources

Podcast: Daily Inventories

The presenters, Laura and

Kimberly, share their different approaches to and thoughts about the 10th Step daily inventory—from simple to complex. Recorded on 1/25/21.

[Recording](#) (28 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

Handout: [Vowel Inventory](#)

5E. Meditation

Resources

Podcast: Meditation

Step 11 in the original 12 Steps suggests prayer and meditation. The value of meditation is by now well researched.

Secular sponsor Allie S. has described how she uses Meditation as a tool. Recorded on 2/22/21.

[Recording](#) (26 minutes)

Exercise: Try meditating at a fixed time every day. Many of us do it on waking. Remember the only bad way to do meditation is not to do it at all. Sitting quietly for a few minutes is good start. If you like phone apps, here are some suggestions and most offer a free trial:

Calm: <https://www.calm.com>

Headspace: www.headspace.com.

Waking Up by Sam Harris:

www.wakingup.com

5F. Self-Exploration

An important part of Self-care is to understand ourselves. As noted in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous (2nd ed., 2018, p. 25), “How we choose to look at and deal with our lives and the world lies at the core of the disease.”

Self-understanding in this context involves

- A deep exploration of the beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors that have led to your problems with food and eating.
- Sharing what you learn about yourself with a person whom you trust and who can be an objective, accepting listener.

These are Steps 4 and 5 in the 12 Steps. They are set out in the harsh tones found in more traditional religions: “moral inventory” of our “wrongs” referred to in Step 6 as “character defects.” Many of us report better results from the neutral language above, or as will be elaborated in 5G below, more positive language. Indeed, some of us chose to inventory of our strengths or past coping behaviors which helped us survive in the past and have now become unnecessary. In any event, such reflection has helped most of us at some point in our recovery

There are many 12 Step resources that provide guidance on different ways to do this type of exploration. It’s also helpful (and for many people, essential) to have the support of a sponsor, therapist, or OA peers during the process.

Resources

Literature: [Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition](#)

Literature: [Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide, Second Edition](#)

here are other approaches to working the 12 Steps for seculars if you search the internet for “secular 12 Steps” or “secular overeaters.”

5G. Positivity

Activities that help us feel more positive can decrease the intensity or frequency of difficult emotions that may lead us to engage in unhealthy eating behaviors. The types of activities that create positive feelings differ for everyone, but common ones include exercise, music, relationship building, positive media, getting out in nature, and affirmations.

Self-reflection: What do you currently do to feel positive? What new things could you try?

Resources

Podcast: Positivity

The presenter, Alan, and audience members, share their strategies for feeling positive. Alan also provides a list of questions that anyone can use to identify ways to become more positive. Recorded on 2/1/21.

[Recording](#) (32 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

5H. Improving Relationships

The development and strengthening of relationships is an essential part of self-care. The original Steps, as presented in the Important References section at the end of this manual, highlight this need in Steps 8 and 9. In the sponsor workshop linked below, Rachel describes how Steps 8 and 9 can be used to help us improve our relationships with others, ourselves, and even the unknown. Step 8 involves identifying where in the past we have done harm to others or ourselves and finding ways to make amends, but it's also about seeing patterns in our current relationships that aren't serving us well. In Step 9, we set about repairing our relationships. We do these Steps to be healed and go forward unburdened by the past as well as to improve current relationships.

Resources

Podcast: Steps 8 and 9

In this presentation, Rachel shares her perspective on Steps 8 and 9 and how she personally completed the Steps. Recorded on 2/22/21.

[Recording](#) (28 minutes)

Self-reflection: What current relationships give me strength? Where would I like to improve my relationships?

5I. Slogans

“Easy does it,” “Just for today,” and “First things first” are some common 12 Step slogans. Each 12-Step community develops their own slogans—small nuggets of wisdom—that guide us in our recovery by helping us remember what we are doing to address our food and eating problems, why being on this path is important, and how to keep going. Some common OA slogans are “One bite is too many and a thousand is not enough,” “Came for the vanity, stayed for the sanity,” and “Quit stuffing your face and start facing your stuff.”

It's worth exploring the treasure trove of experience, strength, and hope contained in slogans and finding those that are meaningful to you. You can also create your own!

Resources

Podcast: Slogans

In this presentation, Rachel talked about how slogans have been an important part of her recovery and shared her favorites. Recorded on 3/22/21 (see next page) [Recording](#) (26 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)

Handout: [Slogans That Have Helped Us](#) (northern Virginia Intergroup)

5J. Learn About the 12 Traditions

The 12 Traditions summarize the lessons Bill W. derived from his and others' experience when building Alcoholics Anonymous as an organization and community. Setting aside the religious tendency in AA and OA to find 12 of everything, those of us who have studied and managed organizations find them extraordinarily helpful. It is sometimes said that the 12 Steps keep us from killing ourselves and the 12 Traditions keep us from killing each other. In fact, the Traditions can also provide guidance in how to live our lives more effectively and with less temptation to eat compulsively. For example the Seventh Tradition says that our meetings should be self-supporting, but this also applies to

us as individuals—we should be self-supporting as well!

Link: [Traditional Twelve Traditions](#)

Link: [Secular Twelve Traditions](#)

These are also listed in Chapter 8: Important Resources.

5K. Secular “Prayer”/ Intentionality

Resources

Podcast: Secular Prayer

One common practice in all 12 Step fellowships is the use of prayer to remove resentments. If we harbor a grudge against someone, we are advised to spend time each day for 30 days wishing the person might have everything they desire, everything we wish for ourselves. Decades of anecdotal experience confirm that at the end of the thirty days the resentment will have gone away—whether or not we believe in a deity or whether we had asked for the intervention of some outside force.

In this presentation, secular sponsor Alan talks about how he has come to see that prayer or intention can be useful, depending on how you define these terms. Recorded on 4/26/21.

[Recording](#) (28 minutes)

[Written Summary](#)



Chapter 6: Service

Service is reaching out to other compulsive eaters—the 12th Step in the original 12 Steps. In practice, that often means connecting others to the fellowship of OA and our secular overeaters community within OA. Perhaps the most powerful insight of the founders of AA was that the best way to keep from having a drink was to reach out to another drunk and help them get sober.

In the story from the Big Book of how AA got started, newly sober Bill Wilson was considering going into a bar while on a business trip to Akron, Ohio. Instead, he looked up the name of a local pastor and called to ask if he knew anyone who had a problem with drinking. The pastor referred him to a member of the Christian Oxford Group, who suggested that Bill contact her friend Ann, whose husband was an alcoholic. Bill went to their house and met the husband, Dr. Bob Smith. Bill moved in with Dr. Bob and Ann for a month and eventually helped Bob

get sober. Dr. Bob's last drink is generally considered the founding date of AA. That act of outreach or service was the basis of Bill staying sober that day—and ever after, as it has been for Dr. Bob and so many since.

In other fellowships, members have taken other members into their homes, lent them money, and gotten them jobs. In OA, we take on smaller responsibilities in our meetings, from opening the room, sharing our stories during shares, reading the leader's script, or being a weekly caller. We become accountability buddies and sponsors. Certainly for some of us writing this manual and helping build the secular community in OA has helped us stay abstinent more effectively than any other aspect of OA.

Service certainly helps with recovery, for most of us, most of the time. However, some of us take on too much service and it becomes a source of stress and

a reason to overeat. As usual, the watch words are experimentation and balance. In the presentation, linked below, the presenter, Paula, suggests that you begin by calling three people each day and talking for at least 5 minutes.

Resources

Podcast: Service

The presenter, Paula, shares the importance of service in recovery, which can include simple acts such as putting away chairs, volunteering to read at meetings or taking on a weekly service commitment.

Recorded on 3/8/21.

[Recording](#) (32 minutes)

6A. Provide Service to Other Members

In the Social Support chapter there are many suggestions for how you can obtain social support. Read that section again for ideas on how you can use the same methods to support other members. There are many ways to provide service to other members. For example:

- Reach out to members who post in the Chat during Zoom meetings that they would like an outreach call or email.
- In a face-to-face meeting, approach a newcomer to offer

fellowship and support.

- Consider becoming a sponsor (or co-sponsor). Sponsors offer help to other members up to their own level of experience. It is also generally a good idea for a sponsor to be abstinent. We need lots more secular sponsors in Overeaters Anonymous.
- Offer to be an accountability buddy.
- Start or join a recovery circle or other peer support group.

6B. Take on Responsibilities for Meetings/Activities

OA relies on volunteers to make meetings and other activities happen and run smoothly. For more information, contact:

SecularServiceBoard@protonmail.com.

Meetings

Every meeting has roles that are filled on a rotating basis, such as secretary, Zoom moderator (not as hard as it looks), newcomer greeter, treasurer, time-keeper, or speaker seeker.

Intergroups (IGs)

Every meeting needs an IG representative and every [intergroup](#) needs officers. Many

intergroups have newsletters or a website and host special events like thankathons. All provide opportunities for service.

Other OA Structures

In addition to IGs, OA has [regions](#), [a world service office](#), and [board of trustees](#) that have roles and responsibilities members can take on to support ongoing operations, conducting meetings, conventions, and other events.

Special Focus Service Boards

Of particular interest to secular overeaters, OA's Board of Trustees has approved the creation of Special Focus Service Boards (SFSBs). Each SFSB can unite all the meetings across all of OA with a special focus, e.g., Men or LGBTQ, or in our case, secular meetings. We conducted a survey of several hundred of us who attend secular meetings. The name we preferred to identify us is Atheist/Agnostic/Secular (AAS). At the time of this writing, the secular meetings are setting up an AAS Service Board. We need volunteers. Our special mission is to serve those of us in OA who identify as non-religious or feel more comfortable in meetings with a non-religious focus. Among the tasks we will take on is assuring

that every Regional Convention includes an AAS session.

Eventually, we would hope to have more literature useful which is conference-approved. Since many of the resources we find useful are currently not conference-approved, our Service Board is a way to connect with others who can share the resources that work for them on a one-on-one basis. Such one-on-one communication in the socializing portion of OA meetings is especially crucial for secular overeaters.

For more information, contact:

SecularServiceBoard@protonmail.com

Secular Overeaters

This is an informal community that provides support to those who don't identify with God-based recovery. They offer community gatherings, workshops, a podcast, website, newsletter, and Facebook and Google groups. Because they encourage the use of outside literature and the use of alternative Steps, they are considered an "outside issue" and thus their services and resources are not allowed at traditional OA meetings. If you'd like to get involved, check out <https://secularovereaters.org> or email secularovereaters@gmail.com.



Chapter 7: Next Steps

Putting It Into Action, One Day at a Time

By now, we hope you have taken your first actions: social support is in place (such as an accountability buddy to call); your first food plan is set; and you have a list of self-care practices. Hopefully, you are taking on small service roles in the meetings you attend, such as timekeeping or reaching out as the newcomer greeter. Please do what made sense for you the first time through this manual. You can always come back to pick the next thing to work on.

We secular overeaters are here for you. We want you to succeed. It helps us to help you. Please reach out to us in the [secular meetings](#) you attend, in the Chat file. Please join our Google Group (secular overeaters community@gmail.com) and our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/groups/secularovereaters). Please come to our workshops.

The Responsibility Pledge in OA is: “Always to extend the hand and heart of OA to all who share my compulsion; for this I am responsible.”

We take this seriously. If the first person you reach out to does not respond, please try again. It helps us to help you.

Chapter 8: References

As you've read through this manual, we've made references to different Tools and Steps. Here are the complete OA and secular versions (if they exist) with references to where you can find out more in the previous chapters of Food Freedom.

The 9 OA Tools of Recovery

This [list](#) is from the OA website, and secular members as individuals can make adjustments as necessary. For instance, we can only read conference-approved literature at official OA meetings, but as individuals and with our sponsors or sponsees, we can read outside secular literature.

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. (See the pamphlet [A New Plan of Eating](#) for more information.) This Tool helps

us deal with the physical aspects of our disease and achieve physical recovery.

> [See Chapter 4: Food Plan.](#)

Sponsorship

We ask a sponsor to help us through all three levels of our program of recovery: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Find a sponsor who has what you want and ask that person how they are achieving it.

> [See Section 3B: Find a Sponsor.](#)

Meetings

Meetings give us an opportunity to identify our common problems, confirm our common solution, and share the gifts we receive through this Twelve Step program. In addition to face-to-face meetings, OA offers telephone and other types of virtual meetings that are useful in breaking through the deadly isolation caused by distance, illness, or physical challenges.

> [See Section 3A: Meetings.](#)

Telephone

Many members call, text, or email their sponsors and other OA members daily. Telephone or electronic contact also provides an immediate outlet for those hard-to-handle highs and lows we may experience.

[> See Section 3J: Electronic Outreach.](#)

Writing

Putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper, or describing a troubling or joyous incident, helps us to better understand our actions and reactions in a way that is often not revealed by simply thinking or talking about them.

[> See Section 5C: Writing.](#)

Literature

We read OA-approved literature, which includes numerous books, study guides, pamphlets, wallet cards, and selected Alcoholics Anonymous texts. All this material provides insight into our disease and the experience, strength, and hope that there is a solution for us.

[> See Section 5B: Literature.](#)

Action Plan

Creating an action plan is the process of identifying and implementing attainable actions to support our individual abstinence

and emotional, spiritual, and physical recovery. This Tool, like our plan of eating, may vary widely among members and may need to be adjusted as we progress in our recovery.

[> See Chapter 2: Action Plan.](#)

Anonymity

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our [Traditions](#), ever reminding us to place principles before personalities (Tradition Twelve). Anonymity assures us that only we, as individual OA members, have the right to make our membership known to others. 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 (Tradition Eleven).

Within the Fellowship, anonymity means that whatever we share with another OA member will be respected and kept confidential. What we hear at meetings should remain there.

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 attending meetings, sharing, and putting away chairs. All members can also give service by putting out literature, welcoming newcomers, hosting a virtual meeting, or doing whatever is needed to help the group. Members who meet specified requirements can give service beyond the group level by serving at the intergroup, service board, region, or world service level.

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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[> See Chapter 6: Service.](#)

The 12 Steps

This includes both the official OA and the Freethinker Alternative 12 Steps for Overeaters versions with the principle of the Step in parentheses; many other [secular versions](#) also exist and many people write their own versions. Next to each Step, we've listed the section in this manual that corresponds to the Step.

OA Traditional and Freethinker Step 1 (Honesty): We admitted

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

[> See section 5A: Morning Reminder.](#)

Step 2 Traditional (Hope): Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to Sanity.

Step 2 Freethinker: Came to believe and to accept that we needed strengths beyond our awareness and resources to restore us to sanity.

[> See section 5A: Morning Reminder.](#)

Step 3 Traditional (Faith): Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Step 3 Freethinker: Made a decision to entrust our will and our lives to the care of the collective wisdom and resources of those who have searched before us.

[> See section 5A: Morning Reminder.](#)

OA Traditional and Freethinker

Step 4 (Courage): Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

[> See section 5F: Self-Exploration.](#)

Step 5 Traditional (Integrity):

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Step 5 Freethinker: Admitted to ourselves without reservation and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.

> [See section 5F: Self-Exploration.](#)

Step 6 Traditional (Willingness):

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of Character.

Step 6 Freethinker: Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.

Step 7 Traditional (Humility):

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Step 7 Freethinker: With humility and openness sought to eliminate our shortcomings.

OA Traditional and Freethinker

Step 8 (Self-Discipline): Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

> [See section 5H: Improving Relationships.](#)

OA Traditional and Freethinker

Step 9 (Love): Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so

would injure them or others.

> [See section 5H: Improving Relationships.](#)

OA Traditional and Freethinker

Step 10 (Perseverance):

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

> [See section 5D: Daily Inventory.](#)

Step 11 Traditional (Spiritual

Awareness): 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.

Step 11 Freethinker: Sought through meditation to improve our spiritual

awareness and our understanding of the OA way of life and to discover the power to carry out that way of life.

> [See sections 5E: Meditation and 5K Secular “Prayer”/Intentionality.](#)

OA Traditional and Freethinker

Step 12 (Service): Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive eaters and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

> [See Chapter 6: Service.](#)

The 12 Traditions

These Twelve Traditions are to the groups what the Twelve Steps are to the individual.

> See Chapter 5: Learn About the 12 Traditions.

OA Version

Link: [The Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous \(pdf\)](#)

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.
6. An OA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. OA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these Traditions,

ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Secular Version

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Link: [Secular 12 Traditions](#)

1. Common welfare comes first. Personal recovery depends on group unity.
2. Group Conscience is the group's authority. Decisions are arrived at by group conscience. Minority ideas get thoughtful attention. Leaders themselves have no authority; they are trusted servants.
3. The only requirement for membership is to show up at a meeting. There are no other membership requirements, no rules and no dues.
4. Each group is autonomous. Its only responsibility is to work with the Steps and to follow the 12 Traditions.
5. Each group has one purpose: to be a support for recovering people.
6. Groups never endorse, finance or associate with outside related enterprises. There must be a clear boundary between 12-Step groups

and programs, such as treatment facilities, counseling services, workshops, support groups and so on.

7. Every group is fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. This keeps groups independent. Non-members may not donate money, goods or meeting space. A collection taken at meetings pays for rent and supplies.
8. Groups are non-professional. Service to the group is volunteer and is done without pay.
9. Structure: Organization within a group and among groups is kept to a minimum.
10. Groups have no opinion on outside issues. This neutrality on all issues keeps groups from being drawn into public controversy.
11. Public relations policy is based on attracting members to the program, rather than promoting it. Member's anonymity is always maintained in the public eye and in the media.
12. Anonymity is the foundation of all the traditions. Groups are guided by the principles of the Steps, not by personalities.