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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **Abstinence In OA and OA's definition of abstinence**
- **What abstinence means to members of OA**
- **How to find and obtain abstinence in OA**

WHAT IS ABSTINENCE?- BRIDGET(NOVATIONS EDITOR)

I have been in OA for approximately a year and a half now and am currently working on my fourth step. I achieved abstinence for only one month so far (months ago), and even then I struggled to clearly define what that was.

I go to meetings, ask people, and read literature searching for the answer. And still I struggle. What I have come to realize is that a) the answer will come in time, b) I cannot give up



searching, and c) the answer is different for everyone. The common theme, which will be seen throughout these pages, is that you must work the steps and the program.

So, in my search for the answer I decided the Novations Newsletter was the perfect platform to search for the answer and perhaps helps others who may be questioning "What is Abstinence?"

ABSTINENCE IN OA

"Abstinence in Overeaters Anonymous is the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight." (Dignity of Choice)

OA literature specifically defines "compulsion" as follows: "By definition, 'compulsion' means 'an impulse or feeling of being irresistibly driven toward the performance of some irrational action.'" (Questions and Answers OA.org) Therefore, "compulsive eating" and "compulsive food behaviors" (as those terms are used in OA's definition of abstinence) means irrational eating, or irrational food behaviors, taken as a

result of an impulse or feeling that feels irresistible.

The objective of OA's definition of abstinence is that the compulsive eater refrain not from eating, but rather, from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors, and work towards or maintain a healthy body weight. Thus, OA calls for the compulsive eater to define his or her own plan of eating which enables the compulsive eater to abstain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors, while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight.

The program suggests that members identify the foods that

"trigger" compulsion. Since individuals are responsible to define their own plan of eating, they are able to change their plan of eating if their needs and understanding of their compulsions change, without that change constituting a breach of abstinence. Members are encouraged to seek counsel with other individuals, generally including a member or members of the OA fellowship, and, most importantly, with their "higher power," before making such changes, to validate that the reasons are sound and not unwittingly a decision based on underlying compulsion. (Dignity of Choice)

STRONG ABSTINENCE CHECKLIST AND WRITING EXERCISE- OA.ORG

Use this valuable tool every day to support you in keeping your abstinence strong and intact.

CHECKLIST

- 1) Have I been abstinent today?
- 2) Did I pray and meditate today?
- 3) Am I maintaining or working towards a healthy body weight?
- 4) Did I rely on my Higher Power to get or stay abstinent today?
- 5) Is what I am currently doing working for me to remain abstinent?
- 6) If I am having problems have I asked someone else what they are doing?
- 7) Have I made an OA call today?
- 8) Did I have an attitude of gratitude today?
- 9) Did I plan my food today?
- 10) Have I helped someone else today?
- 11) Did I have an action plan in place to stay abstinent today?
- 12) Do I have a sponsor and am I working the Steps with that person?



WRITING EXERCISE

- 1) What is compulsive eating for me?
- 2) What are the foods and food behaviors that trigger me to eat compulsively?
- 3) Am I afraid to get abstinent and if yes, why?
- 4) Why do I think abstinence is important?
- 5) What do I do to stop eating compulsively?
- 6) What Steps do I take to remain abstinent in all circumstances?
- 7) What is the difference between abstinence and a plan of eating?
- 8) What actions do I take to maintain my abstinence and achieve or maintain a healthy body weight?
- 9) How do I begin my day in order to abstain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors?
- 10) What tools do I regularly use?
- 11) How does remaining abstinent improve the quality of my life?
- 12) What place does food have in my life today?

ABSTINENCE LITERATURE RESOURCE GUIDE- OA.ORG

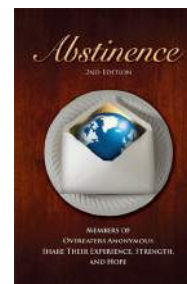
PAMPHLETS

- 1) A Commitment to Abstinence (#141)
- 2) A Plan of Eating (#145)
- 3) Before You Take That First Compulsive Bite (#150)
- 4) Dignity of Choice (#140)
- 5) Is Food a Problem for You? (#750)
- 6) Maintaining a Healthy Weight (#310)
- 7) Many Symptoms, One Solution (#106)
- 8) Questions and Answers (#170)
- 9) Think First (#109)

- 10) Tools of Recovery (#160)
- 11) Members in Relapse (#400)
- 12) Recovery Checklist (#105)
- 13) Welcome Back (#190)

BOOKS

- 1) Abstinence, Second Edition (#994)
- 2) "The Doctor's Opinion" from Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition (#1000)
- 3) The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous (#990)



BEHAVIORS/ACTIONS THAT KEEP ME ABSTINENT- JOANNA

Below is a list of behaviors/actions that I have taken- in addition to getting a sponsor, working the 12 steps, and using the tools- in the past 18 months that have helped me stay abstinent and spiritually and emotionally recover. Without the program, I don't think I could have done these things for myself. I live life imperfectly but I do the things below more and more and they make my life rich and full.

I...

- ride my bike so I can feel the air against my face instead of drive my car
- take public transportation to be in the midst of others instead of drive alone in my car
- take walks to be out in society and see runners and people walking their dogs
- sit in the sun instead of in the air conditioning
- sleep early instead of watching TV
- make calls to friends instead of obsessing
- move forward instead of staying in fear
- weigh my food in public instead of thinking about what others might think of my weighing it
- meet up with friends even when I don't want to
- sponsor instead of just being sponsored
- buy presents for others' recovery birthdays and anniversaries instead of being lazy, hoarding my time, affection, and money
- stay quiet or neutral instead of demanding my opinion be heard
- pause
- do nothing instead of forcing
- dress becomingly even when I don't like what my body looks like in the mirror
- leave work early instead of pushing myself harder
- exercise outside instead of in a gym
- pay the bill when I go out with friends
- cry instead of holding it in
- cry instead because I can and I get to... I say so
- give more than the suggested 7th Tradition amount because my finances will be ok
- wait ten minutes before I respond to a sensitive/triggering text message
- wait until I talk to a sponsor and journal before I talk to my significant other about a sensitive topic
- don't respond to phones, emails after 10pm
- tell my sponsor, my significant other, and my friends important things even when I feel scared, awkward, and embarrassed
- try new things at work even when I'm afraid I'll make a mistake
- ask recovering OAers for help with food decisions because history tells me I can't do it on my own
- let go of obsessing about food because I can trust God and my recovering self...

“Without the program, I don't think I could have done these things for myself.”

“Nothing gives me more strength than abstinence. It is the Number One necessity in my life.”

-For Today, May 3rd

IN A WORD, "FREEDOM"- ANONYMOUS

Recently in a meeting a member earnestly wanted a definition of abstinence. She felt we were confusing and losing newcomers because there were so many opinions.

This led me to do some thinking about how my own ideas have changed over the years. Years ago when I came into OA, there was no need to ask for a definition of abstinence. We ate what was listed on the gray sheet and if there was the slightest deviation, the guilt was overpowering. Gray sheet offered even less variety in those days than it did when it was finally taken out of print. But with such a strict food plan and no choice, I did not have to ask what abstinence was. Believe me, I knew. I did not have to take any responsibility for myself.

There is a description in the OA Brown Book (pgs 117-118) that fits my present thinking: "I believe abstinence can be anything we want it to be, as long as we are honest with ourselves."

I used to sponsor "string bean strict". So did everyone. I knew I'd been using bathroom scales as God for years. Then that food plan became God to me. And I did lose weight. So did the others. It took a long time, but I came to realize that when I am busy talking about food to

those I sponsor at meetings, I am avoiding talking and thinking about what is really my problem. It is a way of being evasive about working the steps. We were all doing that. Oh, we gave the steps lip-service.

Then I saw dear friends who were thin but still suffering from the same old character defects. It was so easy to see theirs. I looked at myself and thought, "Is this all there is?" I continued to be passive, sometimes passively manipulative, though I didn't know it. I did know I was searching for something more and that I did not want to quit eating compulsively. I actually wanted to fill my lack with food, but didn't dare - and didn't dare say so. Being thin hadn't done much for me. I'd been thin on many diets before OA.

I used to wish I had enough money to go to a fat farm on a regular basis to keep the weight down. Now I'm glad I never had that much money. I would probably still never have hit bottom and discovered this serene, honest way of life. I've changed from inside out and I am more content than I ever knew was possible.

When I started paying more attention to the steps, I was far more successful, both in my own recovery and as a sponsor. Of course, there are

those who don't want to work the steps and prefer to find sponsors who sponsor only food problems. It takes what it takes to learn that the compulsion to overeat dies in direct proportion to the spiritual and emotional recovery found in the steps.

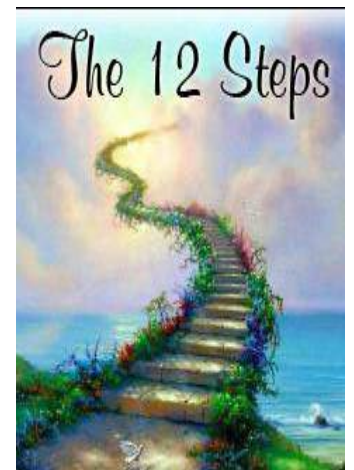
Now, when I sponsor, the ones being sponsored are asked to define abstinence as they want to and to decide what they are going to adopt as their food plan. If they choose to write it down and/or call it to me, that's fine. But it is their decision, not mine. I am no longer God, nor is food. We don't talk much about what we are eating. Talking about food keeps us from finding out about ourselves.

I do strongly urge those I sponsor to read the Twelve and Twelve, the AA Big Book, our Brown Book, Lifeline and the OA pamphlets. They read and I read the same thing. We discuss it on the phone and in person, paragraph by paragraph. We write about pertinent parts. We share and love and care about one another, not about food. We'd lose weight, but it doesn't compare with the burdens of the soul we've dropped.

I thank the beautiful young woman who requested a definition of abstinence. In a word "freedom."

Reprinted from Life line November 1982

"I believe abstinence can be anything we want it to be, as long as we are honest with ourselves."



"...the compulsion to overeat dies in direct proportion to the spiritual and emotional recovery found in the steps."

STEP, TRADITION, & CONCEPT OF THE MONTH

Step 10

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

Spiritual Principle:
Perseverance

Tradition 10

Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Spiritual Principle: Neutrality

Concept 10

Service responsibility is balanced by carefully defined service authority; therefore, duplication of efforts is avoided.

Spiritual Principle: Clarity
(reprinted from OA.ORG)



TOOL OF THE MONTH

A Plan of Eating

As a tool, a plan of eating helps us to abstain from eating compulsively.

Having a personal plan of eating guides us in our dietary decisions, as well as defines what, when, how, where and why we eat. It is our experience that sharing this plan with a sponsor or another OA member is important.

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 dietician.

Each of us develops a personal plan of eating based on an honest appraisal of his or her own past experience; we also have come to identify our current individual needs, as well as those things which we should avoid. 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 helps us 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 living experience.

(reprinted from oanova.org)

NOVA INTERGROUP

Next Novations Topic:

"Why is service important to you to you?"- Articles due October 6th
Email Articles or Suggestion for Novations Topics to:
novations@oanova.org

Next Intergroup Meeting

October 25
10a-12p
Hope Lutheran Church
4604 Ravensworth Rd
Annandale, VA

Intergroup Contact Information

Website: www.oanova.org
Email: info@oanova.org
Phone: 703-823-NOVA (6682)

SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you to the following Member Groups for their recent contributions:

Arlington Shipshape #12
Arlington Sunrise
Friday Idylwood Step
Oakton Hundred Pounders
Manassas OA Big Book Study
Manassas OA H.O.W. Meeting

OA NOVA REMINDERS

Upcoming Events:

Oct 10-12 - Fall Retreat

Harrisonburg, VA

Oct 17-19- Region 7 Assembly, Pennsylvania

November 7- 9- Region 7 Convention, Gettysburg, PA

Volunteers Needed:

Interested in influencing the image of OA Nova and helping to reach those who still suffer?

Join the Out Reach Committee by sending an email to

outreach@oanova.org.

It's a great way to do service while having lots of fun!

FROM THE CHAIR OCTOBER 2014

What does abstinence mean to me? Having written on this subject quite frequently, I wanted to challenge myself with a different approach for this issue of NOVATIONS.

Compulsive eating and my recovery have three components; abstinence is required in each of them. I concur completely with our OA definition of Abstinence which states it is, "...the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working toward or maintaining a healthy body weight. Spiritual, emotional and physical recovery is the result of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program."

Therefore the physical aspect of abstinence is action on my part - that of re-

fraining from eating compulsively; I am willing to utilize all OA Tools to maintain this aspect of abstinence.

Emotional abstinence for me involves applying the Steps to all of my problems with willingness to work and re-work Steps to reveal more areas in need of recovery. In order to maintain this process I attempt to abstain or refrain from acting out my character defects. When I am intentional about this I begin to experience both self-esteem and peace of mind.

I've discovered that both physical and emotional abstinence then result in a lifting of the compulsion for today, resulting in acceptance of life on life's terms.

Spiritual abstinence for me is letting God

be God. Therefore, each day, each moment that I wait for God's direction to do the next right thing, I am being spiritually abstinent - refraining from self-will.

I love page 83 in our 12 & 12 where the penultimate promise is found: "One aspect of this program that keeps us here is the promise of permanent recovery from this baffling malady."

This is what Abstinence means to mean. Remember - It works if you work it and it won't if you don't.

ODAT,

Gail

