**ABSTINENCE: PLAN OF EATING**

A food plan is a commitment to recovery. The HOW disciplines were designed for food addicted people. We believe in a disciplined and structured approach. HOW abstainers do not modify their food plan to suit themselves and commit themselves to black and white abstinence. Deviations invite the return of many other problems.

A food plan is not a personal thing in HOW. This means that we depend upon each other for the strength and growth that we need to remain abstinent. We join together in an effort to free the compulsive overeater from the bondage of food through the use of a food plan, positive thinking, and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

We eat weighed and measured meals with nothing in between, except sugar-free beverages and sugar-free gum. Food is written down, called in to our sponsor and committed, so that we can get on with our recovery and out of the food. We also believe that negative thinking is a large part of our disease, so we abstain from negative thinking.

Those of us who work the HOW program concepts use the following guidelines for food plans.

1. We do not write our own food plan. We use a food plan given to us by a doctor, nutritionist or dietitian. We discuss it with our sponsor. We do not pick one that allows any of our binge foods. If some food on our plan becomes a problem, we avoid it.
2. We do not skip meals, switch meals or combine meals. We do not deviate or manipulate our food plan in any way. If we need to change our committed food during the day, we call a sponsor.
3. We weigh and measure all our portions so that there is no guess work. We do not measure by eye. We use a measuring cup, spoon, and a scale. (Verbally describe what you do with your abstinence kit: scale, cups/spoons, telephone, etc.)
4. We weigh ourselves once a month until we reach goal weight and once a week on maintenance.
5. Unless advised otherwise by your doctor, we take a multi-vitamin and drink 64 ounces of water a day.
6. We do not drink alcohol.
7. We do not use foods containing sugar, except if sugar is listed 5th or beyond on the ingredients label.
8. Above all, we do not vacillate or water down the disciplined nature of the HOW program. It is not the extra string bean that counts; it is the decision to take it.

**SPONSORSHIP**

Sponsors are OA members who are committed to abstinence and to living the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability.

We ask a sponsor to guide us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. In working with other members of OA and sharing their experience, strength and hope, sponsors continually renew and reaffirm their own sobriety. Sponsors share their program up to the level of their own experience. Ours is a program of attraction; find a sponsor who has what you want and ask how it was achieved. A member may work with more than one sponsor and may change sponsors at will.

A HOW sponsor is a compulsive overeater who has completed at least 70 days of back-to-back abstinence and who has taken the first three steps of the program. Sponsors have also completed at least 70 days of assignments.

**Reflections to the Sponsor—Suggestions for Discussion**

No list of reflections and meditations are end-alls and be-alls for the newcomer. A sponsor must be attentive not only to what the new person is saying, but also to what the newcomer is not saying. There are many newcomers who are reticent to purchase books, and who are hesitant to throw themselves headlong into the program. Therefore, we have a list of pre-commitment assignments.

Above all, DO NOT VACILLATE OR WATER DOWN THE DISCIPLINED NATURE OF THE HOW PROGRAM. It is not the extra string bean that is the problem. It is the DECISION to have it that results in some trouble.

The HOW Concept is an alternative for people who have tried everything else— therefore, the program is an immutable triumvirate of tools, steps, and traditions. Using the tools of weighing and measuring our food, sponsors, meetings, phone calls, reading and writing, service, and anonymity, we follow the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions of OA in order to free ourselves from the bondage of food addiction.

SPONSORS DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO PLAY GOD …. WE HELP EACH OTHER.

**ANONYMITY**

Anonymity is a tool as well as a tradition because it guarantees that we will place principles before personalities. It offers each of us freedom of expression and protection against gossip. Anonymity assures us that only we as individual OA members have the right to make our membership known within our community.

Anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and television means that we never allow our last names or faces to be used once we identify ourselves as OA members.

Within the fellowship, anonymity means that whatever we share with another OA member will be held in respect and confidence. What we hear at meetings should remain there. It should be understood, however, that anonymity must not be used to limit our effectiveness within the fellowship. It is not a break of anonymity to give our names and addresses to the secretary of our group or to other service offices of OA for the purpose of conducting OA business, which is primarily twelfth-step work. It is likewise not a break of anonymity to enlist twelfth-step help for group members in trouble, provided we are careful to omit specific personal information. If their disease has reactivated and we persist in protecting their anonymity, we may, in effect, help kill them and their anonymity.

Anonymity is the part of the program that allows each of us to stand in front of our fellows and share for the first time, honestly, who we are, where we have been, and where we hope to go, without fear that our story will be told outside these rooms. For many of us, the OA rooms are the first place where we have no fear being judged or criticized. We are accepted as we are at that moment. This is the first time for most of us that we experience sharing where we are not told what we did wrong.

We come into OA at rock bottom, mangled emotionally, physically and spiritually. We are supported back to health with honesty, open-mindedness and willingness. We are encouraged to speak of our pain and we are lovingly told “your secrets are safe.” Come share our recovery, recovery on a three-fold level: physical, emotional and spiritual.

Lastly, a word to newcomers: please join us. However, if you decide that our program is not for you, please remember that our anonymity allows us to grow and recover from a very serious disease.

WHOM YOU SEE HERE, WHAT YOU HEAR HERE, WHEN YOU LEAVE HERE, LET IT STAY HERE.

**TELEPHONE CALLS**

Compulsive overeating is a disease of isolation. The telephone is a means of communicating with another compulsive overeater between meetings. It provides an immediate outlet for those hard-to-handle highs and lows we all experience. The telephone is also a daily link to our sponsors and, as part of the surrender process, is a tool by which we learn to ask for help, reach out and extend that same help to others.

In HOW we are asked to make at least four telephone calls a day; one to our sponsor and three more to other OA members. These calls give us an opportunity to “talk program” on a daily basis. The telephone is our lifeline.

**MEETINGS**

Meetings are gatherings of two or more compulsive eaters who come together to share their experience before and after recovery and to share their strength and hope OA has given them. Though there are many kinds of meetings, fellowship is the basis of all of them. Meetings are an opportunity for us to identify and confirm our common problem by relating to one another and by sharing the gifts we receive through this program. As HOW members we attend at least one HOW meeting a week.

**LITERATURE AND WRITING**

We study the text book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, referred to as the Big Book, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, another AA book to reinforce our program. By substituting the words, “food” and “compulsive eating” for the words, “alcohol” and “alcoholism,” we can identify closely. We also read OA literature: the *OA book, Overeaters Anonymous*, referred to as the Brown Book, the *OA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *For Today*, for daily meditation, and *Lifeline*, our journal of recovery.

Read on a daily basis, our literature impresses on us certain basic truths that we have found vital to our growth. Our literature and the AA books are an ever available tool that gives insight into our problem, as well as the strength to deal with it and the very real hope that there is a solution for us.

**WRITING**

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

In the past, compulsive eating was our most common reaction to life. When we put our difficulties down on paper, it becomes easier to see situations more clearly and perhaps better discern any necessary action.

**SERVICE**

Carrying the message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers is the basic purpose of our Fellowship and therefore the most fundamental form of service. Any service, no matter how small, that will help reach a fellow sufferer adds to the quality of our own recovery. Putting away chairs, making coffee, talking to newcomers, doing whatever needs to be done in a group or for OA as a whole are ways in which we give back what we have so generously been given. Do what you can when you can. “A life of sane and happy usefulness” is what we are promised as the result of working the Twelve Steps. Service fulfills that promise.

Always to extend the hand and heart of OA to all who share my compulsion; for this I am responsible.

**ANNIVERSARY READING**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, (*insert first name*), Now comes the biggest question yet. What about the practice of these principles in all our affairs? Can we love the whole pattern of living as eagerly as we do the small segment of it that we discover when we try to help other alcoholics achieve sobriety? Can we bring the same spirit of love and tolerance into our sometimes-deranged family lives that we bring to our A.A. group? Can we have the same kind of confidence and faith in these people who have been infected and sometimes crippled by our own illness that we have in our sponsors? Can we actually carry the A.A. spirit into our daily work? Can we meet our newly recognized responsibilities to the world at large? And can we bring new purpose and devotion to the religion of our choice? Can we find a new joy of living in trying to do something about all these things?

Furthermore, how shall we come to terms with seeming failure or success? Can we now accept and adjust to either without despair or pride? Can we accept poverty, sickness, loneliness, and bereavement with courage and serenity? Can we steadfastly content ourselves with the humbler, yet sometimes more durable, satisfactions when the brighter, more glittering achievements are denied us?

The A.A. answer to these questions about living is “Yes, all of these things are possible.” We know this because we see monotony, pain and even calamity turned to good use by those who keep on trying to practice A.A.'s Twelve Steps. And if these are facts of life for the many alcoholics who have recovered in A.A., they can become the facts of life for many more. (A.A. 12 and 12, page 111)

**STEPPING UP CEREMONY**

Before you, you have five candles, Truth, Reality, Surrender, Acceptance, and Knowledge.

OA offers each of us a wonderful opportunity to develop and hasten an attitude change known as ego reduction. The use of these disciplines of weighing and measuring, phone calls, reporting to sponsors and attending meetings, all combine to reinforce our growth in OA. Action is the magic word.

Until we so humble ourselves through these acts, there is no evidence of our ego reduction or our surrender to anyone or anything outside of ourselves. Each candle signifies a step toward arresting the progression of our disease. The first two represent Truth and Reality. Without these two qualities, we would not be recovering compulsive overeaters.

**CANDLE 1**

The candle of truth is the keynote of those who strive to stop the advancement of compulsive overeating. It is the unrelenting force that permits no double standard. Its attainment brings the satisfaction of inward peace. We must fearlessly face the truth to avoid the ever present pitfall of self-deception.

**CANDLE 2**

This is the candle of reality and it is a new light. It opens the door to a new life. It holds a promise of new understanding. It offers a chance for personal renewal. It makes a statement that goes beyond fantasy and it holds the dream of a better tomorrow. Without the light of reality, we are destined to remain in that sick, shadowy world of past mistakes and unrealistic dreams of false tomorrows.

**CANDLE 3**

This is the candle of surrender. In OA surrender is the first and most important act necessary to launching you into the other steps. Without the surrender of your food, your ego, and your will, all else is hopeless. When you surrender, you suspend such negative emotions as disbelief, grandiosity and you open yourself up to the process of learning who you are and where you fit into the scheme of things.

**CANDLE 4**

This is the candle of acceptance, without acceptance you could not have come this far. Acceptance is seeing things as they really are. Acceptance is understanding that we have spent our lives denouncing everything and now we must open up our hearts, as well as our minds and accept. We must accept the will of God. Accept that only He can restore us to sanity.

**CANDLE 5**

This is the candle of knowledge and it opens the door wide. We now know that God is on our side. We can see and hear his pronouncements in our lives. We recognize what it is that we may do and what only he can do. We acknowledge that the greatest gift He has given us; is knowing ourselves.

**Leader (Read After Candle 5)**

Even the newest of newcomers finds undreamed rewards as he tries to help his brother alcoholic, the one who is even blinder than he. This is indeed the kind of giving that actually demands nothing. He does not expect his brother sufferer to pay him, or even to love him. And then he discovers that by the divine paradox of this kind of giving he has found his own reward, whether his brother has yet received anything or not. His own character may still be gravely defective, but he somehow knows that God has enabled him to make a mighty beginning, and he senses that he stands at the edge of new mysteries, joys, and experiences of which he had never even dreamed.

Practically every A.A. member declares that no satisfaction has been deeper and no joy greater than in a Twelfth Step job well done. To watch the eyes of men and women with wonder as they move from darkness into light, to see their lives quickly fill with new purpose and meaning, to see whole families reassembled, to see the alcoholic outcast received back into his community in full citizenship, and above all to watch these people awaken to the presence of a loving God in their lives—these things are the substance of what we receive as we carry the message to the next alcoholic.