

Never Enough

"Never was there enough of what we thought we wanted," (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 71)

Our desires of material possessions (stuff, food and drink) were excessive. We were never satisfied because true satisfaction comes from spiritual fitness. These riches are what truly bring us contentment which costs little but time and effort. These true riches reward us multiplications of happiness and true satisfaction. When we learned where true happiness in living comes from, the material riches are not striven for they simply come along when we offer service. These material things come with no effort to obtain them; they are simply a benefit of the service mentality. Our spiritual desire to serve is what gives us this true, genuine feeling of fulfillment - that which food, drink or material wealth in itself, cannot match up with.

Anonymous, Society Pages, August 2006



LOOKING UP

OA Tri-County Newsletter November 2006

"Why?" Is Not A Spiritual Question

I walked in the rooms a year ago this September. I was at least 50 pounds overweight, depressed and disillusioned. I could not understand why I was fat, in constant emotional turmoil and not living the life I thought I should have been living at my age. One morning, as I was discussing joining a weight loss program to end my sorrows, a friend suggested OA instead. OA seemed a dubious solution, but I was willing to try anything that could get me out of my situation.

Upon joining the fellowship, I struggled. I was supposed to identify myself as a compulsive overeater. Step One required that I admitted I was powerless over food and that my life had become unmanageable. Okay. It was true. But I asked myself, "Why? Where did this disease come from?" Then I got a sponsor who put me on a food plan and expected me to turn over my food to him EVERDAY. I did so, but secretly resented his instructions. Turning over every meal, everyday took entirely too much planning. Again, I pondered, "Why do I have to report my food to this controlling person?" Of course, I never complained about my newfound physical recovery.

After a conflict with my first sponsor, we parted, and I got a new, cooler sponsor who understood me better — only she was even tougher that my first! Naturally the question followed, "Why would I pick someone who was so hard on me?" My new sponsor instructed me to stick to my food plan, call daily, read OA and AA literature, journal, spend a long time — months even — on Step One, and attend five meetings a week. I could not understand why I had to completely rearrange my life for this program. It was too tough to drive from county to county and throughout DC. Getting home late just for a meeting was too much to ask. But I did it and complained every step of the way.

Along the way, despite my constant internal complaining and questioning, my periods of abstinence became longer. I still follow a food plan and have been abstinent just over 30 days. I have lost almost 50 pounds. Also, my willingness grew. I sow attend four meetings to five meetings a week, although my sponsor told me I could cut down to three. I carry program literature with me everywhere. I journal — a task I used to hate—and bring my journal to meetings. Most importantly, I am developing an exciting relationship with my Higher Power and depending on Him hourly, daily and weekly to carry me through program and life.

My relationship with my Higher Power changed most profoundly after a meeting a few months ago. During a share, I complained about a friend's behavior and questioned why she acted in a particular way. A wise OA member approached me afterwards and informed me that, "Why? is not a spiritual question." What?! How could that be true when I considered myself spiritual? And "Why?" was my signature question? Nevertheless, I contemplated her remark and changed the way I talk to God. I no longer ask "Why?" every time my sponsor instructs me to do something. I no longer ask "Why?" when life does not seem to go my way. Instead, I ask my Higher Power questions like "What is your will for me?" and "How shall I proceed?" or "How can I serve another?" Getting rid of the "Why?" makes me accountable for my behavior and attitude. It also forces me to seek God actively and have faith in Him and program. In fact, one year after joining OA, I am overwhelmingly grateful for the God, guidance and growth that has turned me away from self-destruction and toward a new way of living.

Ginea, OA DC-Metro Newsletter, September 2006

What Does Abstinence Mean to Me?

Abstinence has several meanings for me. There is my "bottom line" abstinence, which is NO SUGAR and NO WHITE FLOUR. If I were to "break" this abstinence, I would no doubt fall into relapse. I have ABSOLUTELY no defense against the first bite of either of these foods. By keeping my bottom line abstinence simple, I have been able to stick with it (imperfectly) for 4 years and 5 months.

Then there is my "weight-losing" abstinence...and this has been much harder and much more frustrating. If I just loved and accepted my current weight (which is 35 pounds below my top weight) I would feel more at peace about this. But because it is "unacceptable" to me, I play tug of war with God and keep trying to take back control of my food. And since I have no control over my food, I keep experiencing failure.

After my house flooded last November, I immediately put on "5 pounds of fear". And my fear of this weight gain then caused me to TRY to diet it off – which only added another 2-3 pounds.

It is really about Step 1 and Step 3. Either I go back and admit my powerlessness over food AND my weight – and I turn it over to God – or not. This is very difficult.

I also KNOW that the "way in is the way out" - that working more Program is the ONLY way out of this dilemma for me. And that asking for help - from others and from God is the ONLY solution. Another solution could be just to accept the size I am now - and be at peace with it - so I can ALLOW God to take the rest when he is ready.

Lack of humility prevents me from admitting, accepting and turning over what I cannot control. But being humble enough to admit I am powerless—and asking for help is the only solution that really works for the long haul. "Half measures avail me nothing."

I now humbly admit that I am powerless over sugar, white flour, grazing, snacking at night, health food snacks, sugar-free desserts, carbohydrates and eating more abstinent food than I need to eat. I now turn my will and my life over to my Higher Power and humbly ask for His help. Thy will be done.

Gerri S., Heart of Recover Newsletter, Fall 2006

Abstaining or Dieting An Interesting Comparison

Solution → Diet Thinking → Diet Thinking

There is an initial "psyching-up" or mental preparedness. A build-up of will power takes place.

The end of the diet is the primary goal.

Food obsessions dominate each day. Excessive time is spent in special preparations and menu planning. Food is the primary focus of each day.

After the first "rush", anxiety increases as will power decreases.

Thoughts toward the end of the diet dwell on what can soon be eaten that has been forbidden by the diet. Food fantasies increase.

When the diet ends, one is no better off than before, for dieted-thin bodies are doomed to relapse. And will power will be less reliable in the dieting future.

A diet ends.

Abstinent Thinking &

There is a "letting go" as though a burden has been lifted. Body and mind relax and receive.

Food thoughts are gone between meals and meal planning and preparations are kept simple. Eating is a daily activity but not a focal point.

There is no goal. Like recovery, abstinence is a process, not an event.

As abstinence continues, serenity deepens. Emotions are calmed.

There are few thoughts of unabstinent foods. Fantasies decrease as we surrender to abstinent eating on a day to day basis.

As abstinence progresses, we change. New ideas replace old ones so that, when we are thin, we are better emotionally and spiritually. Strength from HP increases.

Abstinence is forever.

Reprinted from Peninsula Press, April 1992

The Disease Concept of Food Addiction and It's Relationship to Compulsive Overeating

My name is Glinda and I am a compulsive overeater. I have been coming through these doors for many years and have experienced intermittent abstinence during that time. However, a recent, new understanding of the nature of my disease has resulted in an extended period of freedom from the food obsession and considerable weight loss. This new awareness has led me to do extensive research in the Big Book and other resources pertaining to the role of food addition in my compulsion to overeat. Page 164 of the Big Book states that "God will constantly disclose more to you and to us" and I am writing about what has been revealed to me. My hope and prayer is that this information will enlighten and help others as much as it has helped me to understand "the true nature of my malady".

The Big Book discusses the concept of addiction early on in it pages: "Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real food addicts. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows ... We learned that we had to concede to our innermost selves that we were food addicts. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed." (Big Book page 30)

The Big Book correlates this addiction to "...an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity." (Big Book - "The Doctor's Opinion" page xxviii) (Big Book Definition of "Allergy: An abnormal reaction to food or chemical substance.) Examples of Allergies: if you're allergic to rag weed it will manifest itself in sneezing, runny nose etc. If you're allergic to a bee sting it will manifest itself in a rash. If you're allergic to certain foods it will manifest itself in "Cravings". This is a concept that eluded me in the past - that there were some foods I just could not eat without setting myself up for cravings and eventually "failure" to maintain my abstinence (aka a binge).

Highly Refined Carbohydrates

What I have learned is that food addicts typically overeat highly refined carbohydrate foods; those foods which are quickly converted to sugar. Sugar and starch-based foods appear to be so innocent! You might wonder how such innocent appearing foods could show up in the story of addiction. Take a look at the part the refinement process plays in the addictive process.

Evidence shows that every addictive substance has been through a refinement process. All addictive substances start as something natural. "After all, heroin is nothing but a chemical. They take the juice of the poppy and they refine it into opium and then they refine it to morphine and finally to heroin. Sugar is nothing but a chemical. They take the juice of the cane or beet and they refine it to molasses and then they refine it to brown sugar and finally to strange white crystals." William Duffy, SUGAR BLUES, Warner Books, 1976, p. 22.

Refined carbohydrates (sugars and starches) "stimulate increased transmission of dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine. As the synapses become flooded with these neurotransmitters, a feeling of euphoria results and craving for more refined carbohydrates is stimulated...One actually becomes intoxicated by the sugar, white flour and other refined carbohydrates as they act as alcohol in the blood system and hypothalamus." Robert Lefever M.D. and Marie Shafe, Ed. D. "Brain Chemistry: Combinations of Foods in the Blood Trigger Effects Very Similar To Alcohol."

When the Big Book was first published in 1939, the suggestion that food addiction is a disease was so radical that Dr. Silkworth declined the use of his name. It is amazing to note, that in the subsequent decades, our ever-widening knowledge base has not been able to contradict or erode the doctor's original premise. On the contrary, it has provided an even greater opportunity to understand the essential differences between us and normal eaters. We have come to believe through experience that without a thorough understanding of the 'exact nature of the malady' or THE PROBLEM - there is little hope we will dare to take the action necessary to experience THE SOLUTION. As stated in AA's view in "The Doctor's Opinion" page xxiv "In our belief, any pictures of the food addict which leaves out this physical factor are incomplete."

What does this means to me? That unless I recognize that I have a food addiction (THE PROBLEM) then I won't have the understanding I need to take effective action to find lasting relief from this disease (THE SOLUTION). How are problem foods identified? We could examine endless lists of various binge foods. In this way food plans could be

individualized for every food addict. The danger of that approach is that errors would be made which would make it impossible to get out of the addiction. Let's look further at the problem.

The Phenomenon of Craving

The action of trigger foods on individuals predisposed to food addiction is manifested in the form of craving which is always present in the true food addict. Craving is misunderstood by those who have never experienced it. These are the people who tell us, "Just take a little and stop," or "It's okay to eat wheat." Or "Your body won't notice just a little sugar." They don't crave, so they think that we can handle these foods and stop eating whenever we choose. Nonaddicted people get all they want every time they eat. Food addicts, on the other hand, never get enough! The disease ensures that we are never satisfied with moderate amounts of food. This is what sets us apart from normal eaters. We, who are food addicted, can never safely use addictive foods at all. Our bodies will notice if we eat any amount of addictive substances.

This craving or "tissue hunger" is a physical phenomenon which occurs *after* introducing a binge food into the body. When the food addict puts a binge food into their system, out-of-control hunger is experienced that demands more of the same. The only way for a food addict to set up the phenomenon of craving is to introduce binge food into the system. People say, "I was abstinent for two years and I had cravings all of the time." Not so. If they were physically clean, they may have been obsessed with food, or merely desired it, but they did not crave it. The word *craving* deals with the body only. It occurs after introduction of trigger foods into the body. At that point, the reaction is a craving that demands more of the same. This kind of tissue hunger has nothing to do with the mind, it is a physical phenomenon. Kay Sheppard, LMHC, CEDS. FOOD ADDICTION, THE BODY KNOWS.

We are confident that with a deeper awareness of what is REALLY meant by "We admitted we were powerless over food" we will be more likely to come to terms with the unmanageability of our lives, described so well on page 52 of the Big Book. "We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, and we couldn't seem to be of real help to others."

The Doctor's Opinion Revisited

The following material is designed to elaborate on the disease concept of food addiction as put forth by Dr. Silkworth in "The Doctors Opinion", taking off from Dr. Silkworth's "theory." I offer it here in the spirit of the Big Book (page 31) "Science may one day accomplish this..."

"There is good news about one of mankind's oldest diseases – compulsive overeating. Not too many years ago nearly everybody thought it was hopeless. We don't think so any more.

"Now in order to go on with our story, we need to say something here about disease. I think we need to define it, and that's not easy to do. Here's one I like out of a 99 cent pocket dictionary: 'A disease is anything that interferes with the ability of the human being to function normally'. Whatever it is, however you caught it, a disease prevents you from living your life as efficiently as you ordinarily would.

"The definition I like to use for food addiction is: a chronic, progressive, incurable disease characterized by loss of control over food. Let's take a look at what this really means. CHRONIC is self-explanatory. It lasts a long time. PROGRESSIVE is fascinating. It's one of the unique features of the illness, and one of the reasons why most people in the helping professions - medicine, counseling, etc. - gets so frustrated with food addicts. It tends to make them say "What's the use?" almost from the beginning. So while the disease gets worse as the food addict continues to overeat, what about the fellow who resumes his over eating after even a prolonged period of abstinence? Within a short period of time, the symptoms that the food addict will show are the same symptoms showed when overeating was stopped 10, 15 or 25 years before. And usually worse. It's as if those years meant absolutely nothing. I know this is shocking - it has almost a hint of the supernatural - but later I think I can give you a scientific explanation as to why it is a medical fact.

"INCURABLE disease simply means that a food addict cannot be taught to handle <u>controlled</u> social eating. Science has so far given us no cure for food addiction. LOSS OF CONTROL is what makes this disease different from other chronic, incurable diseases such as diabetes. Loss of control does not mean that when a food addict eats - - he's going to eat to excess. Loss of control means that once a food addict takes that first <u>compulsive</u> bite, he can't predict with any reliability whether he's going to have a normal or abnormal eating episode. He's lost the ability to predict his eating behavior. He no longer controls food, as most of us do; it controls him.

"The cause for food addiction, like many other diseases, has yet to be proven. However, heredity studies, done all over the world; clearly show that genetics is far more significant in determining whether or not you'll be a food addict than any combination of social or environmental factors combined. Now I'm not saying a person is born a food addict. No. I've never met a food addict who didn't overeat. But I think it's conclusive that some people are indeed predisposed to food addiction because of their heredity; and if they ever start compulsive overeating, they run an unbelievably high risk of developing the disease.

Approached with a 'beginner's mind', we have found this material indispensable in showing "other food addicts precisely how we have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body." The good news is that loss of control over food can be avoided if that first compulsive bite, particularly of your addictive foods, is not taken!

The Disease of Addiction

Most of the human population who eat highly refined foods is not subject to food addiction. They have not inherited the genetic predisposition to addiction. However, there are large numbers of people who are genetically susceptible to addictions. They have inherited the brain chemistry peculiar to food addicts. Often from earliest infancy these individuals react differently to refined carbohydrates when they ingest them because they have a biogenetic disease, that is, they have a biological defect handed down from generation to generation. All addiction involves the compulsive pursuit of a mood change by engaging repeatedly in a process despite adverse consequences. An addict is an individual who continues to use a substance compulsively, such as food, alcohol or drugs without regard for the negative consequences. Compulsion is always present in the disease of addiction.

"Despite all judgment, reason, insight or consequence, the addicted individual continues to use the substance or practice the behavior compulsively," according to Dr. Doug Talbott in his address to the Association of Eating Disorders Professionals in Atlanta, Georgia. (1) Despite the irrational nature of the process, the addicted individual will continue to pursue alteration of reality. "These individuals are not bad, dumb, weak, evil or crazy – they have a biogenetic disease," Dr. Talbott says. (2) "The answer to this compulsive path of self-destruction lies within the brain itself." (3) Addiction has a biological basis related to the way the brain uses its neurotransmitters. These transmitters effect a change of balance within the brain which brings about an improved feeling. Let's examine the body chemistry of the food addict more closely.

The Biochemistry of Food Addiction

The biochemistry of food addiction follows a path which is initiated when refined carbohydrates flood the brain with dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine. As the brain becomes flooded with these neurotransmitters, a feeling of well-being results and craving is stimulated. This simultaneously creates a deficiency in the brain because carbohydrates block the recycling of neurotransmitters. Thus the brain becomes depleted of needed neurotransmitters. This "feast followed by famine" of brain chemicals upsets the hypothalamus. Since the hypothalamus is the brain's center for emotions and survival, mood and cravings go out of control.

The result is that one is walking around "drunk" on refined carbohydrates. During this process an insufficiency of neurotransmitters leaves receptor sites unfilled. This puts the brain in a condition of imbalance, resulting in distress and depression as well as cravings. It takes increasingly larger and more frequent amounts of carbohydrates to bring the brain back into balance. Over long periods of time the food addict is unable to get back to baseline. To feel better, he continues to eat that which makes him feel worse!

Those who wish to recover from food addiction find it necessary to abstain from those chemicals which trigger the addictive response of alteration of brain and body chemistry. In order to accomplish recovery, food addicts learn to be scrupulous about identifying all the substances that will trigger active addiction at the physical level.

Food addiction is a disease - and that's good news. Food addiction is not the food addicts' fault - and that's good news too. Now instead of guilt, the food addicted person knows the facts and he or she can, with treatment, learn how to live like normal, healthy grown-ups again. That's good news for all of us. That's the best news any human being can ever expect.

In Conclusion

Most compulsive overeaters have three things in common (a) the illness of food addiction, (b) ignorance and misinformation as to the EXACT NATURE of their malady, and (c) a BAG FULL of SECRETS.

There is a widely held misconception that taking a new person to a few OA meetings or giving them a *Big Book* will "plant the seed," and really "screw up their overeating." Our own experience has proven that these actions alone are not the solution.

In our basic text, we find the following statement: "But the ex-problem overeater who has found this solution, who is properly armed with the facts about himself, can generally win the confidence of another compulsive overeater in a few hours." (Big Book page 18 italics - underline added)

It is interesting to note that in the "original manuscript" this read: "...who is properly armed with <u>CERTAIN MEDICAL INFORMATION..."</u> (caps and underlining added)

We find validation of this in Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions: "It was then discovered that when one food addict had planted in the mind of another the true nature of his malady, that person could never be the same again." (Page 23)

My understanding now of the True Nature of My Malady is that I have a two fold disease:

- (1) An allergy of the body. Based upon my research of the Big Book and other sources I now understand why my body reacts differently to refined carbohydrates. Since I quit putting these substances in my body I have been free of cravings and my mind has cleared. I can focus on the second part of my malady and that is......
- (2) Mental obsession. My mental obsession with food in general is so subtly powerful that my will power can not break it. I need a power greater than myself to remove this obsession from me.

I now know that I can't do anything about the physical allergy except not put those foods in my body, one day at a time, with God's help. AND I know that I can't do anything about the obsession of the mind except pick up the spiritual tool box God has given me and apply it to my life. As a result of this action the mental obsession has been lifted one day at a time by the grace of God and I have been free.

"IN A FEW HOURS" we can address two of the three items mentioned above! We can then, and only then, move on to discussions and sharing of the Spiritual Solution which will take care of the illness AND the "bag of secrets."

When this material is in place, and we are confidant that it is understood, we dare to go so far as to explain to the new person that though they may be held ACCOUNTABLE for their past actions, they are not RESPONSIBLE.

The other side of the coin is, now that they DO understand the "Disease Concept of Food Addiction" and that there is a "Spiritual Solution," they are 100% ACCOUNTABLE and 100% RESPONSIBLE.

"For if a food addict failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead." (Big Book ... you find the page!)

Time New Roman Italics = Big Book
Courier New = My Words and/or Paraphrasing
Tahoma = Kay Sheppard, FOOD ADDICTION, THE BODY KNOWS

Recovery From Relapse

Today I am facing the facts. I am a compulsive overeater who has failed over and over at my attempts to control my eating without the help of a Higher Power. I accept that there are some foods I cannot eat and must eliminate them in order to not set up the craving. I am going to write on step one some more before moving on to the other steps.

I have longed and longed for the ability to take bites of food I see others enjoying without negative impacts. To enjoy the social aspect of eating with friends and family and the sweet "ease and comfort" that comes with desserts. EVERY TIME, without fail that I have tried to incorporate this relaxed and "normal" eating into my life, I have ended up bingeing on sugar items and gaining weight rapidly. This time it is from 132 to 148 in just a few weeks. With no end in sight by the way.

I am convinced today that while I may not want to have this affliction, I do. Like it or not. And, I have all the trappings of living with the addiction and not treating it with what I know works. That is, guilt, shame, self condemnation, self pity, inability to be present in life, self-centeredness, fear, loathing, etc. Surely a few moments of "ease and comfort" that the first bite brings is not worth all of the aforementioned. This is truly the insanity of addiction. The willingness to toss out all the meaningful parts of life to have a small, miserable, disconnected existence with food. I am tired of the fight. Thank you God for your grace and I will live in the moment, claiming the power I know exists to pave the way to a permanent recovery.

Anonymous, Heart of Recovery Newsletter, Fall 2006



Baby Steps

I admit that I am irked by the expression "baby steps". I don't see myself in the drooling cherub, the comically intense concentration, the inevitable plop on the butt.

These days I feel more like Humphrey Bogart saving France from the Nazis. There's a war on and I'm not the one with the tanks, so major assaults are not on my agenda. Instead I support the resistance with small daily acts of abstinence. I'm like the partisans who passed notes, placed a light in a certain window, or gave shelter and aid to strangers who knew the password.

Is it reasonable to expect that these small actions can defeat the occupying force? The OA program tells me they can give me a daily reprieve from the compulsion to overeat and I choose to believe it, even when I'm not sure of the outcome.

I cannot outgun or outwit the enemy, but I can "out-faith" it. So long as I keep coming back to meetings and keep working the OA program, my war is not lost. Sometimes it takes all the courage and resourcefulness I've got to take the next right action, but I try to be willing to put myself on the line.

Baby steps, indeed!

Pat C., OA DC-Metro Newsletter, September 2006

I Am A Compulsive Overeater

The Big Book helps to verify my qualifications. In Chapter 3, "More About Alcoholism" on page 31 it says, "We are like men who have lost their legs – they never grow new ones." This passage in the introduction section of every OA HOW meeting is read for a reason. The next paragraph goes on to say that by every form of self-deception and experimentation they try to prove themselves exceptions to the rule and normal eaters.

Here are some of the methods I have tried: eating 2 eggs and half a grapefruit twice a day, limiting my deserts, eating only Lean Cuisine meals, going to the Diet Center, drinking Slim Fast only, and following the Adkins diet. Actually I lost weight on this diet in the early 1970's, but my disease had progressed to a point that when I tried the Atkins Diet 3 years ago I gained weight on it. I had a calorie book I bought in 1968 that I carried with me for 30 years. I had it memorized. I have tried exercising for 1 hour each day. These are just a few of the things I have done to control my compulsive overeating.

Some of these things worked for awhile but when I came to OA HOW I had become hopeless for I knew my disease had progressed to the point where I could do nothing to control my eating. I had crossed the line and become a compulsive overeater.

One of the gifts I've received through the OA HOW program has been the ability to be present...being available to have a relationship with others. When I was so engrossed with food, either controlling the food, being controlled by thoughts of the food or in a state of mindfulness from bingeing, I could not be present. I was there physically but numbing my feelings and thoughts – the very essence of me – with food. The Big Book on page 77 tells me, "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about me." I can't fulfill this purpose if I am consumed by food. I am not present; I am not able to build relationships.

The program of OA HOW has given me the tools to be free from my food compulsion one day at a time. This freedom allows me to live in the now. I am not thinking about what I have in the house to eat, what I should not have eaten, how I ate, what I did eat or how I hate myself because of my inability to control how I eat. Instead, because of the program of OA HOW, I can know I am loved by my Higher Power. The control of my food, the power over my food is not mine. My food is the responsibility of my loving Higher Power. I have learned I am so loved that I have been given the program of OA HOW. Today I can be present. Today I can be of service and to God and to my fellow man. Today I am grateful to be abstinent. Today I am grateful to be a member of OA HOW.

Anonymous, Society Pages, August 2006