

Food Addiction

Stories of Men in Recovery



FOOD ADDICTS
in recovery anonymous

Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA) offers a solution for all forms of food addiction. Many people are finding recovery in FA from obesity, undereating, bulimia, and obsession with food. There are no dues or fees; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

Is food making you miserable?

If you are a man whose pre-occupation with food, your body, or your weight causes you pain, discomfort, or even humiliation, then Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA) may be the solution you have been searching for.

Perhaps diets do not work for you, despite your best intentions and continued efforts. If your weight has climbed, you may be facing continual breathlessness and the very real fear of a heart attack. Your activities may be curtailed.

Perhaps you can no longer play the sports you used to enjoy, or climb a ladder, reach over to tie your shoes, or lift up your children or grandchildren. You may be suffering from constant heartburn. If your weight is normal or you are only slightly on the heavy side, you may be struggling with food obsession, constant dieting, or bulimia. After years of trying to control your problem, you may have given up. You may feel that there is no hope for you.

In this pamphlet you will read stories written by men who have tried diets, exercise, and every other approach imaginable, with no lasting success. Today, all of them have found a common solution in Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA), a Twelve-Step program for food addiction. Whether you have 200 pounds to lose or are simply defeated by your constant struggles with weight or obsession, there is help, hope, and a long-term solution in FA.

I felt like a failure.

Growing up in Canada, I felt like a failure because I was not very good at hockey. Other kids teased me, saying I was a bad player because I was overweight. I was branded “fat.” In school, although I had friends, I was insecure and never felt as though I fit in.

I was resentful toward my sister and the other kids who had what I wanted: a thin body and many friends. At my Bar Mitzvah, I was 5’4” and over 200 pounds. I was outgrowing my clothes, and was embarrassed to wear t-shirts because I had developed breasts. I used to buy junk food at the store with money stolen from my dad, eat full meals as snacks, and then eat dinner with my family.

I went to Weight Watchers camp at age 14 and lost 45 pounds. I was finally a normal looking teenager, but I still saw myself as fat. During college, I bought “healthy” foods with my meal card but then ate my friends’ leftovers. I shot up to 260 pounds (from 190) within three years. At age 23, I had high cholesterol. I began an insane exercise and diet routine, losing 70 pounds in three months, and over the next five years, gained 65, lost 75, gained 35.... After college my career went well due to successive promotions.

I was living the high life in New York City, but I never felt good enough. Outwardly, I appeared confident and happy. In reality, I was unhappy and unhealthy, and my life was unmanageable. I just wanted to stay at a normal weight. Out of desperation, I tried many “quick fixes”—diets, personal trainers, therapists, coaches, and self-help courses— all at great expense. Nothing worked. I was hopeless, desperate, and miserable. I knew nothing about Twelve-Step programs when I first spoke with my sponsor, but figured if it had worked for her for many years, I could try it for one day.

The program provided simple and specific guidance with food and offered a set of tools that I could use to bring sanity to my life. And it was free! I lost 45 pounds and have kept it off for more than two years. I am still in awe that the scale reads the same number every week and that my clothes always fit. Today I have a normal sized body and a life that keeps getting better, thanks to FA.

I just thought I was a guy with a big appetite.

I am 5 feet 5 inches tall and at one point I weighed 215 pounds and had a cholesterol level of 287. My blood sugars tested at 160, which my doctor told me indicated a pre-diabetic condition, and I was unable to stop eating for longer than three hours a day (usually between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.).

Nonetheless, I just thought I was a guy with a big appetite.

Looking back, I realize now that I was physically, mentally, and spiritually ill. I was a slave to my appetite, eating such quantities of food that the acid in my stomach made me sick. I was drinking half-a-bottle of Mylanta a day.

If I slept late, as I did on Saturday mornings, the acid caused headaches and such severe nausea that I threw up long after my stomach was empty. I would take medicine, which put me to sleep for three hours, and when I woke up with the nausea and headaches gone I would go immediately to the kitchen and begin the cycle of eating again.

I have spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars looking for an answer in psychiatrists' offices, to no avail. I was a workaholic and worried constantly. I knew no boundaries and no satisfaction. I always wanted more of every-

thing. My futile attempts to control everything and everyone, and the continual black hole of emptiness I felt in my gut, were symptoms of my mental and spiritual illness.

I had heard of FA but for a long time I was reluctant to come to meetings. The literature mentioned God and I figured it was a religious program. At last, the pain of eating made me desperate. I started coming to meetings, but I decided I could do the program without a sponsor. I didn't weigh or measure my food, since I figured that weighing and measuring food were female things to do. Real men devoured their food. So I devoured my food, and it continued to ravage my life. After three months, I got a sponsor and began to weigh and measure. Miracles began to happen! When I started giving up food as a drug, I found not pain, but freedom.

Since entering FA, I have lost 80 pounds, my cholesterol has dropped 133 points to 153, and my blood sugar count has dropped 103 points to 57. Learning to let go of the food has taught me to let go mentally. I don't worry as much, my rage and anger have diminished significantly, and I have shed many of my workaholic ways. The empty spiritual hole in me has been replaced for the most part with sunlight and gratitude.

Today, thanks to the program, I believe that I am as I was meant to be—thin and healthy. I am discovering myself for the first time.

Within two years of giving up alcohol and drugs, I weighed 307 pounds.

At a young age, I knew that I was different. I was scared of everything. Before I went to bed, I checked all the closets, shut my dresser drawers, and looked under my bed, because I thought something was going to get me. Even when I finally got into bed, I made sure my arms

and legs never slipped out from under the covers. At age five, I had a traumatic experience that seemed to confirm all of my childhood fears.

For the next twenty-nine years, I looked for ways out of that fear. When I finally started school, I had a very hard time because I was scared of everything. I was unable to learn. My head was always somewhere else. I became a good cheater and a liar. At age 12, I found the magic cure: alcohol. In the beginning, I believed it saved my life because it removed all my fear and allowed me to function like a so-called “normal” person, but actually my first drink started me on twenty-two years of active alcohol and drug addiction. I lost my power of choice and eventually ended up in prison and institutions.

After many times in detox centers, I finally got sober. I left my final detox weighing 125 pounds. Within two years of living “sober,” I weighed 307 pounds. I substituted food for the alcohol and drugs. Food had me by the throat. I could not stop eating. Finally, I met someone from another Twelve-Step fellowship who had lost a lot of weight. He introduced me to this beautiful program and I surrendered the food like I had surrendered the drugs and began to truly recover.

I discovered that flour and sugar were dangerous drugs for me. They set up an uncontrollable craving for more, just like the alcohol and drugs had done. After nine months in program, I was in a normal body size. I have maintained a 120-pound weight loss for over ten years. My whole life has changed. Everything I have today is a direct result of my Higher Power and the program of FA. I’ve found everything I need in FA. For this I will always be grateful.

I was addicted to food, running, and perfection.

Food, body image, and concern about my weight have always been the center of my existence. I was never obese, but I was fat enough to feel self-conscious about my body. I came in last in fitness tests, and I felt very insecure and alone. I have used food all of my life to cover up my loneliness, despair, and depression. I remember buying my friends candy with my allowance in elementary school in an effort to cover up a deep and profound sense of aloneness.

I have more memories of eating as a child than I have of feeling close to my parents.

As a child I had no idea how unhappy and depressed I was, but I felt anxious and scared most of the time. My parents' marriage was fraught with anger and tension. I remember coming home from school alone and sitting in front of the television. I spent what seemed like hours eating and withdrawing into my own little isolated world. At the age of 14, I started running. The isolation, the escape, and the attention I received were so appealing that I ran more and more.

By the age of 19, I was addicted to food, running, and perfection. I thought that if I could just be the best at everything I did, I would no longer suffer from feelings of worthlessness and isolation, but I soon progressed into a pattern of running and bingeing. I would run for six months (up to 80 miles a week) and inevitably get injured. Unable to run, I would get depressed and begin bingeing, waking up in the middle of the night with terrible anxiety. After the injury healed I would begin running again and the vicious cycle would continue.

In 1995, after a huge binge, for the first time in my life I forced myself to vomit. Afterwards, I had to admit to myself that something was seriously wrong, and I was really scared. I didn't know where to turn. That summer I went to yet another personal development workshop, hoping I would find a cure for the disease I did not even know I had. I got home high on spirituality, and my food went out of control.

About six months later I went to my first FA meeting. I wanted to lose weight (I weighed 205 pounds) so that I could run a marathon. I got a sponsor but couldn't stop bingeing. I fell back into despair, guilt, and shame. I found myself back in an old pattern: on and off bingeing accompanied by total withdrawal from my family. My four year-old daughter spent her first two years with a father who was "away," regardless of whether I was at work or at home. I had a better relationship with food and the television than I had with her. Finally at Christmas, after one of many binges on abstinent food (from a "health food" store), I picked up the phone, called a sponsor, and walked through the doors of FA into a new life. My only wish for today is that I stay abstinent for the next 24 hours and that I show up and face whatever comes my way. With one bite, my insane past will become my future, so I build my life around avoiding that first bite. I wake up day after day looking forward with hope to what each new day will bring. I am learning to live life without food controlling me. It is truly a miracle.

No matter what I tried, I could not control it.

Twenty-nine years old, 280 pounds, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, chest, back and knee pains, depressed, experiencing bouts of barely contained rage: that was the sum total of who I was before I found FA. Being a man, I learned I was not supposed to worry about my weight.

When I stopped drinking alcohol during my junior year of college, my weight began to rise, and no matter what I tried, I could not control it. Food had become my alternative to alcohol. As a child, I was abnormally interested in food. I would eat second and third helpings. Sometimes my friends would look on, aghast, as I finished very large meals. They would sometimes comment out loud, but I would laugh it off. I was very athletic, so gaining weight was not a concern. As I look back, it was clear that I was obsessed with food and that I used food to help me mask emotions I found difficult to handle.

After college, I slid rapidly into food addiction. Despite living with my parents and working full-time, I could not save money. I spent it all on food and large, loose-fitting clothes. As my body grew, my world shrank. I interacted less and less with my family, friends and co-workers. I gained an average of ten to fifteen pounds every year. Food began to warp my mind. I honestly thought I was not overeating. I simply thought I was eating what a large guy is supposed to eat. I was working out three to five times a week, yet I was still gaining weight.

My first exposure to FA happened when I noticed some of my co-workers bringing in prepared lunches. It took me three years and a forty-pound weight gain to be willing to go to the meeting they invited me to attend. I wasn't looking for a miracle, just a way to get back to a normal size. I found both. In FA, I was able to recognize that certain foods are addictive substances for me.

I learned how to weigh and measure my food, putting boundaries around my meals. I have been able to return to the athletic activities that had become too painful to do at my top weight. In FA, I am learning how to face life without using food as a drug.

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. 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.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to food addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on FA 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 FA membership is a desire to stop eating addictively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or FA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the food addict who still suffers.
6. An FA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the FA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every FA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. FA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the FA 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 and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

What is FA?

FA is a program based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. There are no dues, fees, or weigh-ins at FA meetings. FA is a fellowship of individuals who, through shared experience and mutual support, are recovering from the disease of food addiction.

Who joins FA?

FA members are men and women of all ages from all over the world. Some of us have been obese; others have been undereaters, bulimic, or so obsessed with food or weight that we could not freely live our lives. Among us are people who have weighed as little as 62 pounds, those who have weighed more than 400 pounds, and others who have been of normal weight but were obsessed with food or dieting.

Does the program really work?

Typically, FA members have tried any number of solutions to their problems with food, including (for many of us) years of diets or exercise. In FA, we have finally found an answer that is long-term. FA members have maintained normal weights and found freedom from obsession for more than twenty-five years. As more and more newcomers enter the program, the number of people with five or ten years of recovery continues to grow.



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