

# Food Addiction

There is a solution

foodaddicts.org

## Is food making you miserable?

Have you spent years on futile diets, losing and gaining weight repeatedly and ending up heavier than you were when you started? Or are you watching helplessly, unable to diet, as you steadily become heavier than you ever imagined you would be? Are you obsessed with food? When you eat, are you filled with self-hatred and depression because of your failure to control yourself? Do you feel hopeless?

In this pamphlet, you will read the stories of people who could not stop eating, even though they hated their weight. 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 25 or 200 pounds to lose, or are simply defeated by constant struggles with your weight, you are not alone. There is help, hope, and a long-term solution in FA.

## Each time, I thought, “This time it will work. I’ll lose weight and my life will be perfect.”

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My life was a constant struggle with weight from when I was 16 years old until I came into the FA program at the age of 43. I had always wanted to be thin. From age 16 on, I went from one diet to another. Each time, as soon as I lost weight, I went back to eating, gaining everything back so quickly that I could hardly believe it.

At the end of each cycle of dieting and weight gain, I resolved to find a different diet or another doctor, and I tried again. Each time, I thought, “This time it will work. I’ll lose weight and my life will be perfect.” I kept believing that if I could have the perfect body, my life would be fine.

Over the years, it became more and more difficult for me to stick to a diet for any length of time and my life began to fall apart.

I dieted my way up to 235 pounds. I wore a size 22-1/2 dress, my shoes went up a full size, and hopelessness set in. I hated myself and found fault with everyone and everything around me.

My children were having problems. My husband and I suffered in silence. My feelings of self-hatred and inferiority were unbearable, and I hated getting up each morning to face the new day. The food had me by the throat. I had no way out. I had done it all and nothing worked. Then I found the FA program.

When I came into FA, I was so relieved to learn that I had a disease and that it had a name: food addiction. I learned that there is no cure for addiction but that it can be arrested “one day at a time.” I was told that I would never have to diet again, which was music to my ears.

I became willing to trust and to give this program my best effort. I lost 100 pounds when I joined FA, and now, more than 20 years later, my weight remains stable, and I wear a size 10 (two sizes smaller than I wore the day I was married more than 40 years ago).

Today, I have clarity and a peace of mind that I would never have believed could be mine. My relationships with family and friends have been restored, and I have gained self-respect. The program has worked a miracle in my life and I will be eternally grateful.

## I diet-pilled my way past 350 pounds.

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When I first came into program, I weighed over 350 pounds and I was alcoholic, drug addicted, food addicted, and welfare dependent. I was a single mother on a roller coaster straight to hell. That’s how I describe my life.

Food has always been my drug of choice, though I never knew that food could be a drug. As far back as I can remember, I was obese.

At one point, I really wanted to lose weight, so I started taking diet pills. The first time I went to the doctor to get pills, I weighed 289 pounds.

The pills worked and I got down to 200 pounds. I felt great, but after I had my daughter, my addiction took off. I drank, smoked, popped pills, and ate. I diet-pilled my way up past 350 pounds. I was a raving maniac.

I lived in an apartment with no gas and no heat because I didn't pay my bills. I'd take the diet pills, then drink coffee and smoke cigarettes all day to get a buzz going.

About four o'clock in the afternoon I'd go downstairs and start cooking for everyone. I'd send my boyfriend to the store for rum. When he got back, I'd start drinking. At night, I'd stuff myself with food and then crash. That was my cycle, day and night.

I thought that the diet pills were going to do it for me—that they would save me. But I knew I was hooked and it was getting more and more difficult to find them. The pills weren't working, and one of the doctors who prescribed them for me had been arrested.

I was so big at that point that when I needed a dress for my nephew's wedding, I had to go to a special shop that had clothes up to size 62.

I finally decided that I had to go to FA (my brother and a family friend had already found help in the program). I waddled into my first meeting with my sister. We had to leave a chair between us because we were both so big that we hung over the edges of our chairs.

When I came into FA, all I wanted was relief. I wanted to lose 50 pounds. I'd heard of a doctor who promised to prescribe diet pills if you lost weight.

So, for my first four months, I was just on a diet, trying to lose weight so that I could go back to the

diet doctor. Still, things were going better. I dropped weight, I felt better, and I cut down on the pills. I was only taking three pills a day (in the past I had taken up to 21).

I felt better, but I wasn't standing up at meetings. I wasn't reading or sharing because I knew I wasn't being honest. Finally, one night, I raised my hand at a meeting and I suddenly realized that I had a shot at life if I'd just get honest.

I went home and made a decision that I was going to give this program my all. I was desperate. I got off the pills and stopped using food as a drug.

There is nothing like life on the other side of addiction. This is a beautiful way of life. I am grateful for every second of my life today. I got off welfare and I got a full-time job. I left a destructive relationship.

My weight has been normal for over ten years. Most of all, today I am truly a mother to my daughter.

## I couldn't stop eating and I was terrified.

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I don't know for sure if I was born with the disease of food addiction, but I know that I became abnormally fascinated with food at a very early age.

I was born prematurely, so my first job in my new life was to gain weight. I did so well at it that when I was four, my parents were worrying about my being too fat.

My mother discovered me in the refrigerator in the middle of the night stuffing myself with plain, cold

noodles. She found this so weird that the next day she took me to the doctor.

By age six, I was going to a diet doctor and carrying a calorie counter everywhere. The kids at school were really cruel. I curled up in shame when they called me “Chunky” or “Fatso.” I was usually the last one picked for a team or a dance.

There was a song called the “Too Fat Polka” that was popular on the radio in those days. The lyric went: “I don’t want her, you can have her, she’s too fat for me.” I always cried when I heard it because I thought nobody, even my parents, would want me.

My father wanted so much to help me. He weighed me every day before I went to school and kept asking me, “Why don’t you just use a little will power?” I couldn’t answer him. I had to have the food.

When I crossed the 100-pound line in fifth grade, he looked very disappointed and said, “We’ll never see the other side of that again.” It didn’t get better as I got older. I struggled with the conflicting demons of wanting to eat everything and wanting to be thin.

My dream was to find a magic way to eat the way I wanted and never gain an ounce. I was always trying some sort of diet—Metracal, the Grapefruit Diet, the Stillman Diet. I tried them all. Sometimes they worked for a little while, but cigarettes worked best. They became my best friends. They killed my appetite and somehow eased the anxiety that was my constant companion.

I smoked until I was 40. When I quit smoking, my food devil was unleashed. Until that time, I had struggled with 20 to 30 pounds. When I quit

smoking, I watched in horror as 40, 45, 50 pounds of fat invaded my body. I knew that I was going to cross the 200-pound line. Even worse, the truth began to dawn on me: I just couldn’t stop eating. All day, all night, everywhere, anywhere, I couldn’t stop, and I was terrified.

Finally, I heard about the program and I began the journey that saved my life. I had tried every diet to be thin and every form of psychiatry to be sane, but nothing worked until I found the simple program of FA.

Now I have calmness in my heart where there used to be turmoil. I have a way to deal with food that leaves me free from cravings. I live in a slim, healthy body. I’ve been doing this for many years now, and my life just gets better and better.

I’m truly looking forward to being abstinent for the rest of my life, one day at a time.

## Food was my escape.

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I joined FA because I was fat, unhappy, and couldn’t stop eating. I never understood how I could be successful in so many areas of my life but so unable to control myself with food. I never related how much I ate to how much I weighed.

I weighed almost 200 pounds at my top weight and I am not much above 5’3” tall.

I come from a loving home and was always treated with respect, so I can’t really blame my food addiction on my upbringing. When I was 13 my older brother died, and I felt as though my whole world fell apart.

Food was my escape from overwhelming feelings of loss and sadness. I binged between classes at school, after school, after dinner, and then late at night when my parents were watching television. Sometimes I even hid food under my bed covers so that my parents wouldn't hear me eating—even though they were two flights of stairs below me with the television blaring.

I spent my teenage years dieting. I went to a weight loss camp, where I lost some weight, but I promptly regained it after I got home. I suffered through chafed thighs, diarrhea, red welts from clothing that was too tight, and endless feelings of inadequacy and shame.

I felt like there were two people inside my head: one who wanted to be thin more than anything in the world, and one who had to have the food. The two battled inside of me constantly and I was insane. I tried diet after diet, but I always gained more weight than I lost.

Finally, after trying in vain to find a solution in Eastern religion, yoga, and brown rice (I ate pots of the stuff), I came into FA, where I discovered the truth: I am a food addict, and I am powerless over food unless I turn to a Power greater than myself for help.

My road in FA has not been easy. During my first year in recovery I was fired from a job and asked to leave a rooming situation. I was terrified that I would relapse, but I didn't eat. In the years since then, I have gone to graduate school, married, mourned the loss of my dear grandmother, and reached the point where I hope to start a family of my own.

At one point, life got so good that I stopped putting my program first and, inevitably, I got into trouble with food. Fortunately, I realized my mistake, was able

to change course, and have had no problems since. I have maintained an 80-pound weight loss for over a decade. Most importantly, I have discovered a peace inside of myself that fills me in a way that food never could. Today, I know who I am and I am grateful.

## I have been in a battle with food and diets since I was in grade school.

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I really loved food. I liked the taste. I liked the feeling in my stomach. Most of my memories have to do with food. I wasn't an obese child. I was solid, muscular, and tall for my age, all of which translated into "fat" in my vocabulary.

I knew that I was somehow different than others when it came to food. I remember eating cookies out of the box, one after another. I always wanted to eat until they were gone.

I have been in a battle with food and diets since I was in grade school. When I was 12 or 13, I spent my allowance on Ayds candies. I hid them under my bed and ate them by the dozen until they were gone.

When I was 16, I got my driver's license and a part-time job. I could eat what I wanted, when I wanted, because I had money and transportation. I spent my money on food.

By the time I graduated from college, I had gained 40 pounds. Happiness was so elusive. I spent money on expensive diets—NutriSystem, Jenny Craig and health clubs. I thought that if I were thin, I would be

happy. Between diets and compulsive exercise, I had some success, but it was not enough.

My next thought was that if only I were married, I would be happy. I got married, but it wasn't enough. Then I thought about a baby. We had a baby; it wasn't enough.

Finally, I thought that if only we had a beautiful home, vacations, another baby, I would be happy. We built our dream house, went on nice vacations, had another child. It was still not enough to make me happy.

I became more and more miserable. Any success I had had with dieting slipped away.

My weight climbed to 155, 165, 175. I was 35 years old and I had everything that I'd ever thought would make me happy. So why was I in such pain? Why did I feel so desperate? I didn't have an answer.

I ate more. The periods of control (dieting) became shorter, the periods of bingeing longer and more frequent. My weight continued to climb. I was not able to lose weight and get my life under control despite my New Year's resolutions.

I would get up in the morning and eat a normal breakfast, certain that the day would be different, but before I could make my first sales call (I am a sales representative), I would have to hit two or three drive-through windows to get something to eat. I would eat all day in my car—bags and boxes of stuff.

When I got home, I would eat a fairly normal dinner. Then, after my children and husband were in bed, I would watch television and run a path between the refrigerator and the pantry.

I would finally fall into bed late at night, hating myself, wondering where I went wrong, and vowing that the next day would be different. It was never different. I kept thinking that if I could just get my life in order, I would be able to lose weight. I thought that I ate because my life was so chaotic. I didn't realize that my life was so chaotic because of the way that I ate.

At last, I found a solution in FA. I learned that no amount of willpower or mental resolve can help me control my eating, but if I follow the FA program, my compulsion can be removed.

Today, I am a normal weight, my relationships with my husband and my children have been restored, and I show up for work.

FA has taught me how to handle my life situations without turning to food. I am no longer obsessed with food, dieting, or my body. I never believed that I could be free from the fight with food, but FA has set me free.

## 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?

Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA) is a program based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). 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.

FA was formally organized in 1998, although it began as part of another twelve-step program in the early 1980s. Some FA members have been continuously abstinent since that time. Abstinence in FA is equivalent to AA's "sobriety" and is clearly defined: weighed and measured meals with nothing in between, no flour, no sugar, and the avoidance of any individual binge foods.

## Who joins FA?

FA members are people of all ages from every part of the world. FA includes people who were morbidly obese, substantially underweight, or even at a normal weight. Regardless of their size, they were tormented by cravings, dieting, bulimia, and/or an obsession with exercise.

## Does the program really work?

Many FA members tried other solutions to address their problems with food, including years of diets or exercise. FA offers a long-term answer. Abstinent members find freedom from addiction and maintain healthy weights. The number of people with years of unbroken abstinence continues to grow.

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