

# Food Addiction

Stories of Teens and  
Twenties in Recovery

[foodaddicts.org](http://foodaddicts.org)

### **Is food making you miserable?**

- Do you feel ashamed about your behavior with food?
- Do you overeat or starve yourself?
- Do you purge, exercise, or use laxatives to get rid of food?
- Do you feel separated from your friends because of your behavior with food?
- Are you getting in trouble at home or at school because of sneaking food or hiding the way you eat?
- Do you find yourself counting calories or planning your next diet during class?
- Do you steal money for food?
- Do you feel that if only you had a different body, your life would be okay?
- When you eat, are you filled with self-hatred because you can't control yourself?
- Do you feel depressed?
- Do you feel hopeless?

**You are not alone.**

We are people in our teens and twenties who have been where you are. In this pamphlet, you will read about our struggles with food and the suffering it brought us—and about how we found a common solution in Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA), a Twelve-Step program for food addiction.

Whether you have five pounds to lose or 200, whether you are bulimic or anorexic or simply defeated by your struggles with food and body image, you are not alone. There is help and hope—and a long-term solution—in FA.

## **I was willing to do anything to be in a thin body and be happy.**

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As far back as I can remember, I have always gotten a “high” from eating sugar or flour products and quantities of food. I felt a lot of shame around food. I stole and hid food and often lied about how much I had eaten. I matured physically at an early age and was bigger than my peers.

I always had a feeling of being different and never felt comfortable in my own skin. When I entered high school, my peers caught up to me in physical maturity, but I was still bigger. I realized I was fat and could not control the way I ate. I tried to diet but could not do it. The little hope I had vanished.

When I was 18, I was at my heaviest weight and more depressed than ever. I was willing to do anything to be in a thin body and be happy. A friend of mine told me of a Twelve-Step program for people who had problems with food. I had heard of how the Twelve Steps worked for alcoholics. I felt I was an alcoholic with food, so I attended a meeting.

For the first time in my life, I heard people telling my story. I had hope that there was a way of living that could work for me, so I stuck around. That was three years ago. I have been 50 pounds lighter for more than two and a half years and no longer cry when I look in the mirror. Food doesn't light up for me in the way it once did. I have learned that food addiction is a disease that is mental as well as physical.

Diets did not meet my needs as a food addict, nor did they relieve me of the mental obsession I had with

food. I am no longer depressed, and I am learning how to live a good life. I am very grateful for the willingness that I had three years ago to try the FA program for just one day.

## **By age 19, I could no longer ignore my frightening loss of control.**

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Me, a food addict? Are you kidding? If you had told me just five years ago that I would soon be addicted to food just like an alcoholic is to alcohol, I would have thought at the very least you had a few screws loose. First of all, I wasn't fat! Far from it, I was a skinny teenager and had even tried to gain weight for several years. How could someone like me be a food addict?

By age 19, I could no longer ignore my frightening loss of control over my eating. Why did I eat so much that I was sick and bloated, often stealing other people's food and eating in secret? My eating habits had always been a bit strange, but now I was out of control. Day after day I would repeat this desperate behavior. I could not seem to control myself. As my binge eating and isolation got worse, so did the depression I'd been struggling with throughout my adolescence.

No matter what I tried—youth-empowerment workshops, therapy, anti-depressant drugs, health food, meditation (to name just a few)—I always slipped back into hopelessness, desperation, and uncontrollable eating. It was getting harder and harder to take care of myself and to show up for work.

I was scared and miserable when I walked into my first FA meeting, but that first meeting gave me hope.

I learned that food addiction is a life-threatening illness just like alcoholism; and that there is a solution.

Coming to FA at 19 years old, I know I have been spared decades of the hell that I hear about in older members' stories. I no longer eat to blot out an unbearable existence. I have a wonderful, simple life; and I look forward to each new day.

One day at a time, FA gives me freedom from the insanity I used to live in, and the chance to live a normal life. I know in my heart that FA has saved my life.

## **I became bulimic at age 13. At 20, I felt as though my life was over.**

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As a child, I was chubby and suffered from extreme fear, doubt, and insecurity. I have a history of sexual abuse by my father, but that isn't why I ate the way I did. What I have learned is that no one is to blame for my food addiction. I have a disease that is physical, mental, and spiritual; and it led me down a path of self destruction.

Adolescence was hard for me. I lived in books and films and spent a lot of time eating at the movies and in front of the television set. I just wanted to drift away and feel good all the time. I “became” characters from the books I read and the movies I saw; my biggest obsession was Marilyn Monroe. I always felt fat and “less than”, except when I was caught up in a role.

I became bulimic at age 13. I purged two or three times a day throughout my high school years. I felt

huge even though I was only ten pounds overweight. I went to a psychiatrist out of fear that my esophagus would burst. I hated food but had to have it.

I always thought I would be rich and famous and die a legend by the time I turned 21, but nothing of the sort was happening. At 20 I felt as though my life was over. I was throwing up uncontrollably 10 or 11 times a day. My weight kept escalating, despite the purging; and I no longer fit into a size 14. All my money was going for food.

I tried traveling to Europe and living abroad. I tried compulsive exercising, cycling, yoga, acting, writing, going to college, and anything that I thought might fill me; but nothing ever could. Diets never worked for me because they always left me lonely and hungry. I finally surrendered and accepted the fact that I was a food addict.

Now I am 31... and I love my rich and full life. I was given the gift of really enjoying my twenties. If you are a young person who is reading this, you, too, have the opportunity to be spared years of misery. Many miracles and joy are awaiting you. You don't ever have to hurt yourself with food again.

## **When I started eating something, I couldn't help but finish it.**

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I believe that I have been a food addict since I came out of the womb. As early as nine or ten, I began having the feeling that food was a drug. When I started something, I couldn't help but finish it. I started feeling ashamed of my body because I was so fat. At 12, I weighed 174 pounds, with a huge double chin, round belly, and a

square back. Making friends was hard because I was so insecure and got teased a lot in school. I wanted what everyone else had all the time. I was on a constant search to be someone other than myself.

I failed at the diets I tried as a kid because I was always trying to find a way I could keep eating and not feel deprived. I would work my way around the kitchen on a futile hunt for the one thing that would "do it." I couldn't make it through a page of homework without sweets and sugary drinks. I would read the same paragraph over and over and get frustrated because I couldn't concentrate. I thought it was because I was a "free spirit" and a "creative type," but now I see that I was in a food-induced fog.

College was worse. I gained the "freshman 60" instead of the "freshman 15." There was so much food in the cafeteria I didn't know what to do. At this point, I started really hating food. Sugar began to hurt my mouth, and I felt sicker and sicker. I felt trapped in my body. I had new stretch marks every day. My thighs rubbed together, and I would sweat a lot. I remember one day trying to pull my underwear up, and it wouldn't go past my knees. I was mortified.

I found Program when I was 19 and weighed over 220 pounds. Although I didn't feel "at home" at my first meeting, I really, really wanted to be thin. So I listened. At the time, I did not think I had a life problem, nor did I make the connection between what I was eating and my weight. Although I didn't really understand it at first, I loved the idea of being completely honest about my food. That was so new to me!

The most important thing I have received from FA is a relationship with a God of my understanding. I am now

longer lonely; and when I am scared, it is fleeting. I am no longer as hard on myself when I screw up. I am in a thin body and have the energy and will to really live. The more I surrender, the more peace I have. Without FA, I'd be sunk. It has never let me down—for that I am forever grateful.

## **I ate to make myself feel better.**

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I found this program of recovery when I was 19 years old and in college. I have kept 80 pounds off and haven't binged for almost 13 years. When I was a kid I had loving parents and many friends and got good grades.

However, I never felt “normal.” It seemed as though everyone else knew how they were supposed to act, but I didn't. I was very self-conscious about my weight. I loved food, especially sweets and junk food. I used to go to the homes of certain friends just because I knew they had food I couldn't get at my house. In junior high, I never got asked to dance at the school dances.

I was klutzy and always got picked last in gym class. I was so jealous of the skinny girls in their skinny jeans. I ate to make myself feel better, to push the sad, hurt feelings inside so I wouldn't have to feel them anymore.

In high school and college, I tried many diets, therapists, and even a guru at a yoga center. Nothing worked. I just got bigger and bigger. My life was also really out of control. I was an English major and usually started my papers the night before they were due, with boxes and bags of sugar and flour at my

side. If I was on a health-food kick, it was boxes and bags of “healthy junk food,” purchased at a health food store. My work was mediocre because I never took the time to make it better; I was too busy with the food. I acted in plays and ate the props and other binge foods before, during, and after rehearsals and performances.

I was in a relationship with a guy who made my skin crawl; but I was too afraid to leave him because at almost 200 pounds, I was sure no other man would want me. Finally, during my senior year in college, I went to a Twelve-Step meeting.

It took me almost a year to accept this program. But once I got it, I grabbed on with both hands. I lost my excess weight. I finished college with honors, went on to get my Master's Degree, and then a Law Degree. This program gave me the strength to go through school without the food. I weighed and measured my food in the dining hall, and nobody had a problem with it. I felt so good about myself. I was thin and my life was changing. I had hope.

Today I know that my only real problem is food addiction. Everything else is just a life situation. Everything will pass, if I just don't eat. If I ask for help and take it one day at a time, weigh and measure my food, go to meetings, and take my sponsor's suggestions, I know I never have to be out of control with food again. I never have to diet again. I never have to be fat again. I can be free of fear and self-doubt, and fully alive. Most importantly, I have discovered that I never have to be alone again, that my Higher Power and my FA fellowship are always there for me.

## **I knew I had found the solution the day I walked into FA.**

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I weighed about 280 pounds when I came into program at age 22. I have lost 145 pounds and have maintained my weight loss for over six years.

As far back as I can remember, food and weight were problems for me. I was embarrassed about my weight as a child and was teased by other kids because of it. I always felt as though I didn't fit in. Not only was I chubby, I was very insecure and fearful.

I tried to buy friends and ended up being mean and bossy with them because they never met my expectations. I thought losing the weight and being able to fit into designer jeans would solve these problems. When I finally did lose some weight and bought those jeans, I quickly learned that it wasn't the answer.

My home life was also very chaotic, and food was my main source of comfort amid the chaos. By age 15, I had begun experimenting with cigarettes and alcohol. I also sought out boyfriends who didn't really care about me. Through all of this, I continued to gain weight and to draw further into myself, eventually refusing to even try to make new friends.

I began to suffer from insomnia, anxiety attacks, and heart palpitations. I had high blood pressure and a cholesterol problem. My knees and head ached frequently, and I had shooting pains in my legs, arms, and neck. I had skin problems, including acne on my back, and occasional infections. I had stomach problems on a daily basis and had trouble breathing.

All of that is gone now. Obese and angry on the outside, scared and immature on the inside, I was willing to do anything if only I could be thin and happy.

I knew I had found the solution the day I walked into FA. Having tried every conceivable diet by the time I was 12 years old, I was scared and not sure I could do it.

And I was right. I couldn't do it alone, but with the help of a Higher Power and the FA program, I lost the weight fairly quickly and other things immediately started looking up for me.

I continue to be willing to do anything to keep the recovery I've gotten in FA, and I'm very grateful for that. If I can successfully abstain from addictive eating for over seven years, I truly believe anyone can. I was a drunk with food, and it affected my whole outlook on life. Because of this program, I feel better at 29 years old than I ever have in my life.

## **At 19 years old I felt as though my life was over.**

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I started out life as an outwardly happy and healthy little boy. But I now see that by a very early age, I had the personality traits of a potential addict. I had a lot of trouble adjusting to life situations.

After my parents' divorce when I was three years old, I began to isolate and to develop a rageful and explosive personality. School became a continual struggle for me. As early as second grade, I violently rebelled against doing what I was told.

In junior high school, my violent behavior toned down; but I became very depressed, withdrawing

more and more into a world of drawing, science-fiction books, comics, and weight lifting. I hated being a skinny teenager and was continually frustrated that I couldn't seem to get more muscular. For a while, my eating was rigid and controlled, but then I began to go to the other extreme, sitting in front of the TV after school and stuffing myself. Because of overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness I began therapy at age 12. However, I continued to isolate and to binge on huge amounts of food, always in secret because I felt so ashamed.

Over the next few years, I was on a search for relief: I tried vegetarianism, yoga, meditation, antidepressant drugs, living in communes, and, finally, hitchhiking cross country. I still couldn't stop bingeing. At 19 years old I felt as though my life was over. That frightened me enough to seek help, and I soon found my way to a Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous meeting.

At my first FA meeting I found hope. I was so relieved to find out that I wasn't alone in my struggles with eating, and I learned that there was a way out of the pain I was in. Even though I was young and still thin when I got to FA, my obsession and compulsion with food had prevented me from freely living my life. FA gave me the tools to deal with life without using food as a crutch; and gradually I have found something I never thought I could have: a useful, happy and normal life. I have even gotten into college! FA has taught me how to live, and given me a second chance to become the person I think I was always meant to be.

## My classmates made comments about my weight.

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When I was a senior in high school, I heard about a Twelve-Step program for people who felt they needed help with food issues. I was tired of not succeeding with diets. I was tired of dreaming of the day I would be all grown up, have a family, and finally have the time to deal with my weight.

I had been affected by food from a young age. When I was small, I remember sneaking it even though it was free for the taking in my house. If someone entered the room while I was eating, I tried to hide it. I often lied about having already eaten at my grandmother's house when my mother offered me dinner at home. I wanted more.

I matured early and was bigger than most of my friends. I felt really awkward in my body. I always felt too big. Although my friends and mother told me I looked good, even beautiful, I felt fat and overweight.

Classmates sometimes made comments about my weight. My weight and my dislike of myself robbed me of many things. I really wanted a boyfriend but didn't have one. I couldn't dress the way I wanted to and felt depressed when shopping for clothes with friends.

I always wanted to go to the food court afterwards. My first thought when asked to go swimming was how I could keep my body from being noticed by boys. I always wore a big shirt or left a towel by the edge of the water so I could cover myself with it immediately. Even though I longed to wear a colorful, two-piece suit, I only wore black.

Today I no longer flinch when seeing my reflection in the mirror. I went to my senior prom thin and happy. In college, I continued to weigh and measure my food in the dorm cafeteria. My friends accepted this, and some even thought it was cool.

Now I have my own apartment and continue to keep my weight off. I have lots of nice friendships today. I enjoy dating and shopping, and I have a healthy vision of myself. I like myself and no longer feel strange saying that. Life is fun! I'm glad I did not have to let too many more years go by before joining this program and letting it change my life.

## **Before I found program at age 14, food was my comfort zone.**

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I came into the program when I was 14 years old. Before that, I knew I had a different relationship with food than other people but never really knew I was a “food addict.” I just knew that my two thin sisters could eat whatever and whenever they wanted; but that when I ate like that, it showed. My body reacted differently.

For me, one was never enough—I was always asking for seconds and thirds. I had lost my “hunger meter,” and I ate as long as there was something available. I ate when I wasn't even hungry; but felt bored, tired, happy, sad, excited, or just happened to be sitting in the kitchen. Food was my comfort zone, and I used it to numb my feelings.

I used to be very hard on myself about schoolwork and was in a constant struggle to excel. While studying, I always had a flour or sugar food item with

me. It was hard for me to focus on what I was doing—my head was in a huge fog, and I couldn't think straight. I was constantly thinking of how and where I could get more food.

When I first came to FA, I tried to do the program on my own; but it didn't work. I didn't know what I was getting into—I just knew I was attracted to the glow of the abstinent people I saw. At first, I found it difficult going to meetings where the ages ranged from 25 to 70; but that's gotten easier, as I have learned how to get along with people of all ages.

Being in a healthy body gives me more self-confidence. My relationships have become healthier, and I'm able to think for myself. The fog has lifted. I've become more disciplined in my studies—my GPA has gone from a 3.1 to a 3.8—and I am now applying to college!

My life has turned a full 180 degrees. The way I was abusing myself with the food, I know I was headed for many more years of misery. Having been spared those years, I don't take this program for granted—I know it is saving my life.

## 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.

**foodaddicts.org**

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