

To our
Families
and
Friends

foodaddicts.org

If you are reading this, you probably care about someone who has joined or could benefit from Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA). We hope this pamphlet will help give you a basic understanding of food addiction and the FA program, and that it will answer many of your questions.

What is Food Addiction? In FA, we view food addiction, like other addictions, as a disease of the body, mind, and spirit—an inability to control oneself that is the result of mental obsession and physical compulsion. Some signs of the illness are huge weight gains or health-threatening weight losses, bulimia, compulsive exercise, and mental obsession with food, weight, or exercise.

FA members have found that we are addicted to foods made with flour and sugar, and to quantities. Without the program, we are unable to make healthy choices regarding food, regardless of the incredible willpower often evident in other areas of our lives. Some of our members have been obese, and some have been many pounds underweight. Still others were a healthy weight but struggled constantly with obsession and unsuccessful diets.

The FA program is based upon the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Like AA, FA is a fellowship of individuals who help one another recover from addiction through shared experience and mutual support. The program frees us from obsession with food, eating, and weight. It teaches us how to maintain our health and helps us change our attitudes and behaviors so that we can stop turning to food as a solution for our problems or a means to run away from our lives.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do you follow a specific food plan and weigh your food?

We plan what we are going to eat each day because our impulses have always led us to destructive behaviors with food. If we didn't weigh and measure our food, our histories prove that we would inevitably end up eating too little or too much.

Why don't you eat flour and sugar? Can't you have just one piece of something on a special occasion?

Sugar and flour trigger uncontrollable cravings in us. Despite our best intentions, we always end up losing control when we attempt to eat them. Our solution is to avoid sugar and flour completely, one day at a time; but our food plans include everything necessary for a healthy diet.

Why do you go to so many meetings?

It's very hard to learn how to live without using food as a solution and crutch. We find strength and encouragement when we meet regularly with others like ourselves.

Why so many phone calls?

Phone calls help us to focus on what is really important in our lives and to stick to our food plans. By calling each other often, we feel less alone and better able to handle situations that used to make us turn to food.

What is a sponsor?

Sponsors are experienced FA members who guide us in our recovery. In the beginning, we talk by phone with our sponsors daily. They share their experience with us and give us the encouragement we need.

How can I help someone who has joined FA?

Members of FA owe much to their families and friends. Your genuine interest and concern are important to us. Often, joining FA is the hardest thing any of us will ever do. As you may imagine, it is not easy to suddenly change our patterns of eating—to stop having all sweets, bread, and pasta, for example. When we first start in FA, most of us experience symptoms of withdrawal, such as exhaustion, aching limbs, headaches, mood swings, irritability, and anxiety. In this phase, the most important things you can offer are your patience, encouragement, and support. You may even want to attend a meeting in order to get a better understanding of FA.

Conclusion

Like alcoholism, food addiction affects everyone who is close to the addict. You have seen us endanger our health and, possibly, our lives. When we enter recovery, you may perhaps feel hurt that despite your best efforts in the past, you could not seem to help us. Addiction is a powerful disease. As addicts, we have realized that we must find and receive the aid of a Higher Power if we are to recover. The FA program helps each of us find that Higher Power. As we enter recovery, we know that the changes in ourselves and our lifestyles inevitably cause changes in our families and relationships.

We may ask to shift the times when we eat together or find it temporarily necessary to avoid restaurants. You may see us spend what seem like hours on the phone or watch in bewilderment as we leave the house for yet another meeting.

We want to reassure you that although the beginnings may be difficult, in our experience, the result of the FA program can be a greater love and understanding of each other than was ever possible in the past. After a time, we thoroughly adjust to our new way of living. We participate in life fully and zestfully, enjoying birthday parties, meals out, holiday celebrations, vacations, and other special times with our family and friends. Phone calls help us to focus on what is really important in our lives and to stick to our food plans. By calling each other often, we feel less alone and better able to handle situations that used to make us turn to food.

Our relationships are transformed. We try each day to do the best we can to grow and change. We come to value our families and loved ones more than ever before, and they tell us that they like the people we have become. If someone you love has just joined FA, we believe that there will be many wonderful times ahead for both of you!

For More Information

For more information, meeting lists, and literature, please contact FA at the address printed on the back of this pamphlet.

Husband #1

When I first met my wife, I was aware that she was overweight and unhappy about it. Only gradually did I come to understand what food addiction is and to recognize the often devastating effect it had on her and on us as a couple.

When during our early relationship she first got abstinent in FA, I began to see her lose weight and brighten considerably in terms of her moods and enthusiasm for life. This of course was pleasing to me.

Unfortunately, this period did not last. It was then that I began to see just how consuming and pervasive her disease of food addiction was. It adversely affected every corner of her life and a good deal of mine. She began to regain the lost weight, but this struck me as the least of her concerns.

She became increasingly withdrawn, often focusing on some inner negativity. Occasionally, she tried to disguise this behind a rather transparent cheerful

exterior, much in the way she hid her bingeing from me, only to be found out when I pulled discarded fast food containers and candy wrappers from beneath the car seats.

If I asked whether she was “eating,” she would get defensive or angry and state that it was none of my business. However, the reactivation of her disease had considerable impact on me, personally. As a married couple, we were sharing financial accounts. Her spending on food and her need for new clothing to replace what she had outgrown, as well as her compulsive shopping (presumably to serve as a distraction from her discomfort), drained our accounts and built up a considerable credit card debt.

I never doubted that FA would be the means of salvation from the suffering caused by her disease of food addiction. Early on, I had attended a couple of meetings with her and had been sufficiently impressed by hearing the qualifications. I could plainly see that the Twelve Steps worked for people. But why wasn't it working for my wife? Being angry with her for seeming to fail proved irresistible. Occasionally, she would let on that she was frequently suicidal, information that I had no way of dealing with, especially given that I shared her perception that her situation grew more desperate day by day. Happy times were always overshadowed by a heavy emotional cloud due to her eating and my reaction to it.

When she got abstinent a few years ago, I held my breath. I hoped that a corner had been turned, and so it has. We have had a wonderful time during which we have rebuilt our relationship and paid off our debts. The pain of those early years is gradually

receding in my memory, and I hope we will both remember that FA is the only solution. This is essential for her continued recovery and for our mutual confidence. One of my great teachers in life said, “Trust is the recognition of commitment in another.” Though it was not always so, I can now say unequivocally and with much joy that I have complete trust in my wife.

Husband #2

My wife came into FA two years ago. She had tried many different diets over the years. Weight Watchers worked well for her the first time, less well after that. I felt bad for her when I’d see her eating uncontrollably. I knew it made her feel ashamed and bad about herself. I supported her dieting and tried not to undermine her efforts with my own behavior.

When she first became involved with FA, I was nervous because I didn’t know what it was. It seemed like such a huge commitment, and my idea of a Twelve-Step organization was that it had cultish overtones. Two things gave me confidence. First, she was introduced to FA by a good friend of mine from work, whom I liked and respected and who had been doing the program successfully for over a year. Second, I spent some time during the first week reading the AA “Big Book.” The sincerity and lack of pretension in the stories and in the organization itself impressed me a great deal.

Initially, understanding how to work the food plan was challenging. Now, after two years, I wouldn’t say that there are any huge challenges. It does require a major commitment, on my part as well as hers. We

have needed to make changes in our way of living in order to accommodate phone calls, meetings, meal preparation, and disciplined meal times. However, the benefits (psychological and even spiritual—much as it surprises me to say the latter) are so great that sometimes I feel as though I'm the one encouraging her to stick with it.

I definitely recommend this way of life to others who have serious problems with food. It does demand strict abstinence from flour and sugar, and major commitments of time; but the strengths of FA are the simplicity of the food plan, the mutual support offered through the meetings and phone calls, and the self-knowledge and self-acceptance gained by participants.

I've gained a great deal from FA myself, though I'm not a member. My eating is much healthier, and I've lost almost ten pounds. I've gained psychological and spiritual insights from discussions we've had about the Twelve Steps. Most importantly, I've seen the person I love most regain confidence and a sense of self-worth... and look incredibly gorgeous and sexy as well!

Husband #3

My wife has been in FA for approximately 15 years. I know she tried numerous diets, fat farms, etc., before coming into the FA program. This was before I knew her. The most challenging thing for me about her being in FA has always been my own weight and my own insecurity about how she looks at me.

Another challenge is the amount of time FA requires, especially given the tremendous amount of service she performs. We often talk about what she can do to help out the family. We don't schedule family functions or social events when she has meetings. Her program comes first. Everyone has social clubs, work, or other restrictions that prevent them from doing everything; for us, it's FA.

I would definitely recommend this way of life to others. I sometimes break my wife's anonymity—with her permission—and explain that there is a program that lets people eat three meals a day and look wonderful. What I have gained personally from her being in FA is that I've met a wonderful group of people. More importantly, I have gained a tremendous amount of serenity, honesty, and love (total and unconditional) from my wife. I know for a fact that she wasn't like that before program. She is an incredible person, much of which she, and I, owe to the FA program.

Wife

My husband has been a member of FA for six and a half years. He began around the time of the birth of our second daughter. A binge eater, D. would control his weight with exercise and various food plans and diets. When I was pregnant with our first child, D. gained weight along with me, but his didn't come off with the birth as mine did. I had to hide my favorite chocolates or cookies so that I could have one when I wanted a sweet. Sometimes he would find my "stash", and then I would have to find a new place to hide them.

He could never understand how I could eat only one or two chocolates or cookies to satisfy a craving because he would always finish off the whole works. His mood swings were part of his personality that I had come to accept as just a part of the way he was.

D. was always in training for running and would try food fads to complement his running program. It was a standing joke to ask what he was “on” for food this week before I did the weekly grocery shopping.

These were generally pretty healthy food fads; so when he started FA, it was seen by both of us as just another “plan.” I shopped and cooked accordingly—not much differently from the previous plans. About six months into it, FA finally took hold; and I began to see some positive changes, particularly in attitude and mood. Weight was not so much the issue as maintaining balance and emerging from self-centeredness. The first year was quite a struggle, but there was much more good than bad. D’s moods were more manageable and he benefited from the support—getting the type of understanding and support from the fellowship that I just couldn’t offer. This took the pressure off me, and our relationship has improved as a result.

Going to FA meetings replaced the extensive running schedule, so I didn’t notice or begrudge the time spent at meetings or on the phone. Over time I recognized that time spent on program paid off in having a more balanced and happy husband. Because he has more structure and control in his life, he is able to give more; and I don’t feel as though I am carrying the burden and responsibility of the family alone.

Initially, explaining D’s food plan to family members

and friends when sharing meals was awkward. Sometimes it still can be. However, because it is such a sensible way to eat and people today have a greater consciousness about health, it is almost always favorably received. When I see others with serious food problems, I am careful not to “recruit” them to FA. I find that only when they are ready will they even hear the message FA offers. There are so many mixed messages “out there” that individuals must come to their own realization if and when they require a program such as FA. However, for us, the program has had incredibly positive results and as a way of life is very manageable, comfortable, and constructive.

Mother

When my daughter came into FA, we were surprised because we had never seen her eat uncontrollably. She had always tried different diets, but she was never very overweight; so we assumed she was just experimenting with different ways of eating. It turns out she ate alone, often late at night, and did a great job hiding her sickness.

When she started FA, we were shocked to find out that she considered herself a food addict. We didn't understand, and it was scary to think that something really was wrong with her.

It was also challenging, at first, trying to understand the disease. When she started telling us how bad things had been when she was in the food, we felt helpless that we hadn't been able to do anything for her. We thought this would be a passing phase, but she became more and more committed to the program over time.

She used to drive two hours to meetings. These long rides, often in bad weather, were worrisome to us. When she came home, she was so strict with the food and so into the program that it concerned us. We just did not get the whole picture for a while. It finally started to sink in that this was not just a phase; this was our new daughter.

The family learned to accept and respect her for taking such good care of her body and soul. Actually, I have adopted some of her eating habits. I have also learned the value of the support, respect, and acceptance among FA members. I learned that food addiction is truly a disease, just like addiction to alcohol or any other drug. I tell as many people as I can about the program because I feel that it saved my daughter's life.

Daughter

I was only 12 when my mother told us about her FA program. We were in the car; and, with my usual curiosity, I asked a question or two, then shrugged my shoulders and forgot about it. I understood that Mommy will be eating differently now, and that was it. Of course, my brother, who was seven at the time, just went on playing his Game Boy in the back seat. Since I was so young, I don't remember a lot about her strange eating habits before she joined FA, except that she would eat my snacks or not want to share. Over the past three years, I have come to understand why all my Halloween candy disappeared so quickly every year.

What I do remember is her crazy exercising. My mother used to go to the gym excessively. Every night

she would pick us up from our after-school program and take us to the gym, where we would spend our time in the kids' playroom and eat a fast-food dinner that we had picked up on the way.

The gym was her obsession. Now, she goes about twice a week; and her purpose is to stay healthy, not to be thin. Now, most days we are all home by 6 p.m. instead of 9:30; and we have well balanced family dinners together several nights a week. Our lives are much more relaxed. Even though she makes time for meetings, she has time to be more involved because she is not distracted by food and weight.

The most challenging thing for me at first was explaining FA to members of my extended family or to my friends. By now, most of my extended family knows; and though they may not understand it, they accept it. The only ones who still are difficult are my grandparents. My grandmother keeps on asking my mother if she wants some pasta, but I guess that's what you get with an older Italian mother.

As for my friends, it was weird for me to explain in the beginning; but after I told my best friend, I got over it. Since most of my friends are very open-minded, I tell them if they ask. This program gives people, who can't control their eating habits, a way to do so and to correct the problems caused by uncontrollable eating habits.

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.

NOTES

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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FA World Service Conference-Approved Literature Revised June 2012