

# The Raven



## IDEA

IDEA is an acronym for “International Day Experiencing Abstinence”, It is celebrated on the third Saturday in November. OA members, according to Overeaters Anonymous, are encouraged to “begin or reaffirm their abstinence from compulsive overeating.” Every day could be, with the strength of a Higher Power, IDEA.

## Abstinence

The Overeaters Anonymous statement on abstinence is: *“Abstinence in Overeaters Anonymous is the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. Spiritual, emotional and physical recovery is the result of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program.”*

In 1961, Abstinence became a tool of Overeaters Anonymous. It remained a tool until 1995. The collective conscience of the OA members , God working through them, came to understand that abstinence was more than a tool. The delegates at WSBC listened and responded to the members and decided upon “A Food Plan” to replace Abstinence as a tool. It indicated that the primary purpose of OA is to become and be abstinent.

[https://oa.org/files/pdf/abstinence\\_and\\_plan\\_of\\_eating\\_handouts.pdf](https://oa.org/files/pdf/abstinence_and_plan_of_eating_handouts.pdf)



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# Without The Fight

The words "Hello, I'm a compulsive over-everythinger" tasted bitter in my mouth. I didn't know if it was the sour truth or the burnt hatred I had for my weakness that made it so unpalatable. But there it was! My first admission of powerlessness was right out in the open before a group of complete strangers at my first Overeaters Anonymous meeting.

My life management experience to that point had been disastrous. I had spent the last 10 years fighting a brutal battle against myself, gaining and losing the same 100 lbs 4 times, abusing myself with every effort and non-effort. I had finally openly declared my compulsive self the winner, and knew I didn't have what it took to pretend or even try to be "better" anymore.

On that cold January day, my 38th birthday, I stared down the reality of snug fat pants, depression, sleep apnea and the threats of arthritis and pre-diabetic diagnoses, and accepted that I had reached my rock bottom. My "I'll start tomorrow's" ran out on me, and it was clear that the perfect "tomorrow" would never come. I had to start exactly where I was, and build something entirely different than anything I had known.

My problem? I had no idea what to do or how to do it. All my previous attempts had left a trail of physical disaster and emotional ruin from fits of ANGRY self-loathing and HANGRY self-will. None of my resolve could stand even the slightest of threats, and my inside world looked like a violent war zone, raw and completely broken.

The only house left standing on my block, was a humble structure with 12 steps and a cozy fire.

*"My 'I'll start tomorrow's' ran out on me, and it was clear that the perfect "tomorrow" would never come."*

This is where I found my refuge. I made my beginning, and scratched out a loose form of abstinence with the guidance of my Higher Power, a sponsor, and the encouragement of a new-found fellowship.

In practicing my abstinence, I had won freedom, freedom from the insanity of destructive thought and behavior cycles, freedom from my own blind selfishness, fears and insecurities, freedom from overwhelm, depression and guilt, freedom from demoralizing waste and apathy, true freedom!

The promises of the Big Book were mine, and it surprised me at how quickly I began to recognize them in my life. They started small and developed exponentially. As my abstinence tightened up, my chains of dependence on destructive patterns loosened. The desire to overeat was not willfully overpowered, skillfully conquered or cunningly avoided. It simply was not there to be battled.

Each day became an opportunity to discover and love myself and others. My freedom had become a gift that only helped me better see the truth of each circumstance and determine the next right thing.

I discovered that sometimes that thing is to simply accept what is. Sometimes that thing is to clean up my trail of destruction. Sometimes that thing is to build my higher self and others. But always, with everything, peace, love, and acceptance.

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## Without The Fight (Continued)

The freedom is mine for the choosing, and there is peace like I have never known before. This peace is what guides me to my next right thing, and has manifested an authentic spiritual, emotional and physical transformation I hope will continue.

I am in the process of releasing years of resentments, accepting myself and others with gratitude, and loving parts of myself I thought were impossible. I have lost 50 pounds in the process, WITHOUT THE FIGHT, and found a genuine confidence within myself that is fun and hopeful. I still have a long way to go, but the joy is in the journey now, and not dependent on some far

off set of goals or expectations. Life is far more free and beautiful, and it all started with 12 little steps, and a willingness to change.

If your diet experience and inside world are anything like mine, I invite you to find refuge in the same humble structure with 12 simple steps and the cozy fire of fellowship. May your journey bring you joy and peace, and lead you to your next right thing.

Sierra

## Higher Power Enabled Abstinence

One of the things that most appealed to me about Overeater's Anonymous was the freedom to define your own Higher Power and your own concept of abstinence. As someone who had tried a lifetime of diets, being handed a list of foods to eat and not eat would have been met with skepticism. Yet another diet.

While I appreciated the freedom to define abstinence in a way that I could willingly embrace, I struggled with it for my first few months in program. It was difficult to break free from my own efforts to manage my food intake. I tried no sugar, no wheat, no dairy. I applied various rules for myself: no drive thru, no eating after 5pm, no fruit juice. I tried to adopt what most seem to be

using, eating 3 planned meals, nothing between and no binge foods. I was unable to find consistent abstinence with any of these methods. I still felt I was trying to manage my disease myself. Nothing felt different. I had been over this terrain before. I knew how I truly wanted to handle abstinence. I wanted to no longer be in control of my eating decisions. I wanted to turn it over to my Higher Power. I wanted every bite I took to be one my Higher Power had led me to eat. But it sounded so "out there." Would God really be so actively involved in my life as to direct every mouthful?

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# Higher Power Enabled Abstinence (Continued)

I decided to trust that inner voice and give it a try. The change was immediate. I felt free from the diet mentality. I felt free from the constant struggle with food. I had indeed embraced powerlessness and given it over to my Higher Power. This was now His problem. I was at peace. I had quit “fighting the unwinnable fight” as my sponsor called it. The ability to be abstinent became easy. The obsession with food was broken. I ate what my Higher Power told me to eat and I did not eat what I was reaching for when He said “no.” It was truly that simple. The weight began to come off. The mental serenity was lovely. I was able to work the Steps in a productive, centered manner.

Life feels normal. I don't have to avoid situations and places in order to manage food and keep abstinence. I could pass out Halloween candy without a problem. I could go to dinner with friends. I could grab fast food. I could throw a birthday party. In each and every situation, I simply asked my Higher Power, “What do you want me to eat?”

This doesn't mean I never struggle. Sometimes I want to eat a particular item and my Higher Power says “No.” Usually He provides sufficient strength for me to be obedient but sometimes my disease puts up a fight and I am tempted to disregard His instructions. This is when I need to use my tools. I might call a fellow OA member or read some literature or pray. But as I write these words, I have been in recovery almost nine months. I have been abstinent for three months (since I adopted this definition of abstinence). I have lost 28 pounds. And most importantly, I am experiencing serenity, joy and healing, both personally and in my relationships.

I'm so grateful for this program and that my Higher Power led me to a place of choosing an “abstinence I can live with.” I am experiencing a freedom from self and food that I have longed for my entire life

Charity L

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*“This was now His problem. I was at peace. I had quit “fighting the unwinnable fight” as my sponsor called it.”*

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## I Was At Peace

I have been in OA for seven or so months. When I started, I was hesitant about the OA, and its meetings but decided to give it a try. My goal was to be able to quit overeating and lose weight which up to that point I had not been able to do. I read through a lot of the material and went to many meetings. Somewhere in there I became acutely aware that not having the ability to stop eating wasn't the real problem. The real issue was being willing to have my higher power do it for me. He could do for me what I cannot do for myself. This idea, applied in a practical way revolutionized my thinking and started me down the path of abstinence.

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Abstinence for me is allowing my Higher Power to call the shots in life, starting with my compulsive eating. It is more than not just compulsive eating, it is removing myself from the throne of my own life, changing my self centered world view, allowing my Higher Power call the shot to the degree that life is changed. In order for this to be done I had to trust that my Higher Power could and would do this. But I turned it over to him. So there is a choice to be made to put my faith in my Higher Power rather than your own ability to not eat. OA's first step, coming to the point that I am powerless to stop over/compulsively eating.

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*"He could do for me what I cannot do for myself. This idea, applied in a practical way revolutionized my thinking and started me down the path of abstinence."*

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## I Was At Peace (Continued)

The definition of abstinence for me is to not eat compulsively at any time. Even if I'm eating only three meals a day, in those meals am I overeating compulsively? However the beginning of my abstinence started by limiting my eating only to three meals a day, no in-between eating, as my abstinence grew I became convicted of, in the three meals a day, "was I compulsively overeating".

The goal became to be abstinent while eating even a meal, to be abstinent of compulsive eating in total. Is the next bite I take one of compulsion? Or is it what the body needs for fuel? Since this clarity of abstinence, I feel it has been the start of my real Abstinence.

Craig L.

## Abstinence Has To Be Number One

Recently, I read in OA literature that abstinence is the most important aspect of my life. This viewpoint has been voiced by many people in the program. In the past, I have considered this belief, but I decided to meditate on this conviction. After several meditations, I have come to accept this opinion. To acquire this attitude, I used my experience. If I am not abstinent, then I do not have a connection with God. The channel is blocked and God is not truly assessable.

Step 1, if I accept it the implications of it, means that I cannot control the amounts of food, frequencies I eat, and/or my eating behaviors. At least, not on my own power. Step 1 tells me that I lack this power. In my introduction to OA, I knew this, but was unable to do anything about it. I tried dieting, but the outcome was always the same. I ended up eating compulsively. I knew that I was different. And I resigned myself to the fact that I would always be fat and miserable,

eventually dying young.

Members in the program told me their experience concerning food. They told me that there was a way out, there was a way to live without wanting to overeat, but I would have to be willing to go to any lengths for this to happen. I asked, "I am willing to go to any lengths, but any lengths of what? And they replied that I would have to change my entire life. They added that they would give me a week to change. Of course, I would later discover that the process of change is the 12 Steps.

I started OA trying to stay on a diet that I found in a book. It wasn't working so well. I was trying to "manage" it. However, after starting OA, still using the same diet, it began to work, but I wasn't managing it. I was busy using the tools and beginning to apply the steps to my life. What

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# Abstinence Has To Be Number One (Continued)

and beginning to apply the steps to my life. What was different? Well, I learned a new concept. Choices. My abstinence, my food plan, was MY choice. It has to be my choice otherwise it is nothing more than a diet.

I stopped thinking the way I thought when I came in. I stopped my diet mentality thinking, cheating, start over, and just a little bit won't hurt me. These were lies I told myself in the illness. I stopped living a lie. They were right, I was changing. I learned that I know NOTHING about losing weight. Today, I still don't know anything about losing weight. I know a little about God and the 12 Steps, and God willing and me willing, God will reveal more.

Of course, I found a sponsor who used the Big Book, gave me tough love, and showed me how to grow up and accept life on life's terms. He told me, "Don't do it the way I did it the first time. They told me that it was a three-folded illness: physical, emotional. And spiritual. I thought that abstinence was the physical, it was not. I thought that I would get abstinence (the physical), get emotional balance, and then I would find God. It didn't work. I had it ass-backwards. The physical was my weight and body. I had to get abstinent, seek God, get the emotional recovery, and then I would receive the physical recovery." I listened. That is how it worked for me and continues to work for me.

"What do you have to lose but your fat and your misery? We are not asking for your money. You decide your abstinence, there is no diet. There

are no doctors or pill. There are no people to please, no lectures to be endured, no axes to grind. We just want your fat and pain," said one of my sponsors. I had nothing to lose. I was living on borrowed time on a dead-end street. Family and friends (most who I pushed out of my life) feared for my health. The asking price was only my fat and misery. Well, that and changing my whole life.

At first, for most of us, OA is like a cheap diet club, the fellowship is enough for us to experience abstinence. And it isn't until Step 2 that we are restored to sanity (wholeness, soundness of mind). However, for me, I started to surrender from the start. I was weighing and measuring my food, but there was no effort. "What is this?" I thought. I noticed that I was busy using the tools and working Step 1. I met my sponsor three times a week and was going to four meetings a week.

After 14 years in recovery, I failed to enlarge my spiritual life, I stopped using the program (12 Steps) and using the Fellowship (the other half of Overeaters Anonymous). In time, I lost my abstinence. Along with losing my abstinence, I lost nearly every spiritual growth I had in recovery. Ideas, concepts, and thoughts that once dominated my life, and the way I lived life was gone. Another set of ideas, concepts, and thoughts began to return, my disease took over. I could no longer contact God, food again began my God.

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*"I learned that I know NOTHING about losing weight."*

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# Abstinence Has To Be Number One (Continued)

My old master returned. And it was impossible for me to apply this way of life to the way I lived life. Bill W. was right. No one who is still eating will be able or willing to live this way of life, at least it is true for me. I would not draw an abstinent breath for 10 long hellish years.

Eventually, OA found me again, and I returned. Abstinence has to be number one for me. Just like the first time I entered OA, I weigh and measure. It is my choice. It works for me. Also, as in the first time, abstinence has to change. The first time I redefined my abstinence as I was aware of issues. For example, removing greasy foods because they didn't work for me. I discovered that I needed to remove certain foods and behaviors. I had to be honest with myself. Step 2 was the answer, as I recover, I am restored to sanity, so I can be honest with myself. This time, I am older, so I noticed that I don't need the same amounts I needed 30 years ago. I had to change the amounts of foods I was eating. God made that possible.

For me, abstinence has to include God. Without God, I cannot remain abstinent. I am grateful for OA's definition of abstinence, "Abstinence in

Overeaters Anonymous is the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. Spiritual, emotional and physical recovery is the result of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program." It is so true. Plus, it is broad enough for each of us to define it for ourselves.

This way of life is simple, but not easy. Because of abstinence, letting go of self, walking the path, this process has resulted in me letting go of my fat and misery. It will be an ongoing lifelong process. For rebellion dogs my every steps at times, and I break out in a rash of self. But I keep putting one foot in front of another. My first sponsor was right, first I need to be abstinent, seek God, God will restore my sanity, I will then receive emotional balance as a result, and then I will recover physically. I am grateful to be a compulsive overeater, for the fellowship and the program of action, and the recovery this program provides me. It is saving my life, one day at a time.

Randy

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*"This way of life is simple, but not easy. Because of abstinence, letting go of self, walking the path, this process has resulted in me letting go of my fat and misery. It will be an ongoing lifelong process."*

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Alaska Intergroup

P.O. Box 761

Palmer, Alaska 99645



# **Strong Abstinence Checklist and Writing Exercise**

Use this valuable tool every day to support you in keeping your abstinence strong and intact. You may also use it as the focus for meetings and workshops.

## **CHECKLIST**

- 1) Have I been abstinent today?
- 2) Did I pray and meditate today?
- 3) Am I maintaining or working towards a healthy body weight?
- 4) Did I rely on my Higher Power to get or stay abstinent today?
- 5) Is what I am currently doing working for me to remain abstinent?
- 6) If I am having problems have I asked someone else what they are doing?
- 7) Have I made an OA call today?
- 8) Did I have an attitude of gratitude today?
- 9) Did I plan my food today?
- 10) Have I helped someone else today?
- 11) Did I have an action plan in place to stay abstinent today?
- 12) Do I have a sponsor and am I working the Steps with that person?

## **WRITING EXERCISE**

- 1) What is compulsive eating for me?
- 2) What are the foods and food behaviors that trigger me to eat compulsively?
- 3) Am I afraid to get abstinent and if yes, why?
- 4) Why do I think abstinence is important?
- 5) What do I do to stop eating compulsively?
- 6) What Steps do I take to remain abstinent in all circumstances?
- 7) What is the difference between abstinence and a plan of eating?
- 8) What actions do I take to maintain my abstinence and achieve or maintain a healthy body weight?
- 9) How do I begin my day in order to abstain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors?
- 10) What tools do I regularly use?
- 11) How does remaining abstinent improve the quality of my life?
- 12) What place does food have in my life today?

# Abstinence Literature Resource Guide

The following literature is specifically helpful for obtaining and maintaining abstinence. Use literature every day to support you in keeping your abstinence, and share the list with newcomers and sponsees to help them understand and find abstinence. You may also use the list to create meeting and workshop topics.

Literature can be purchased on the OA website at [bookstore oa.org](http://bookstore oa org).

## PAMPHLETS

- 1) A Commitment to Abstinence (#141)
- 2) A Plan of Eating (#145)
- 3) Before You Take That First Compulsive Bite (#150)
- 4) Dignity of Choice (#140)
- 5) Is Food a Problem for You? (#750)
- 6) Maintaining a Healthy Weight (#310)
- 7) Many Symptoms, One Solution (#106)
- 8) Questions and Answers (#170)
- 9) Think First (#109)
- 10) Tools of Recovery (#160)
- 11) Members in Relapse (#400)
- 12) Recovery Checklist (#105)
- 13) Welcome Back (#190)

## BOOKS

- 1) Abstinence, Second Edition (#994)
- 2) “The Doctor’s Opinion” from Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition (#1000)
- 3) The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous (#990)

## FREE DOWNLOADS FROM OA.ORG

- 1) [Abstinence PowerPoint workshop](#)
- 2) [Strong Abstinence Checklist](#)

# Alaska Intergroup Schedule

<u>DAY</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>CONTACT</u>
Wed	6pm	Alano Club, Snohomish & Wasilla Fishhook	Topic	Charity 357-7123
Thurs	6pm	St. Michael's Parish, (At the office building, in the Knights of Columbus Rm.), 432 E. Fireweed, Palmer	OA and AA 12 and 12	Randy 745-7485
Sat	9:30am	Alano Club, Snohomish & Wasilla Fishhook	Big Book Study	Jody 376-3593
Sun	6pm	St. Michael's Parish, (At the office building, in the Knights of Columbus Rm.), 432 E. Fireweed, Palmer	MP3 Speak- er/Topic	Randy 745-7485

## Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the  
difference.