

Questions Non-OA Members Frequently Ask Volunteers Answers culled from literature and trustee input

1. What is compulsive overeating?

Compulsive eating is a progressive illness which cannot be cured but can be arrested. Compulsive eaters are “driven by forces they don’t understand to eat more or less than they need, and they eat this food in ways that are not rational.” (Q & A, p.2)

2. How does OA work?

The twelve steps, patterned after the ideas originated in AA, are the heart of the OA recovery program. They offer a new way of life which enables the compulsive overeater to live without the need for excess food. The OA program works best for the individual who recognizes and accepts it as a program involving other people. Attending OA meetings and associating with others who suffer in a similar manner brings hope and awareness (Q & A, pages 6 and 10).

3. What are the Twelve Steps?

The steps embody spiritual principles, which promote inner change and effect physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery. (Q & A, p. 10 and To the Newcomer, p. 2)

4. Is OA a religious organization?

“Overeaters Anonymous has no religious requirement, affiliation, or orientation. The twelve-step program of recovery is considered “spiritual” because it deals with inner change. OA has members of many different religious beliefs as well as some atheists and agnostics.” (About OA)

5. Does OA recommend a particular diet?

OA does not endorse any particular food plan. At the present time, OA is putting together a pamphlet with suggested food plans. However, members may follow the food plan of their choice. It is strongly recommended that the members contact a health care professional before embarking on any particular plan of eating. The OA program works, not by following a particular food plan, but by working the 12 Steps. (Trustee response on current policy; A Plan of Eating: A Tool for Living)

6. Does OA work for everyone?

OA, like AA, works for those who work the program. (Big Book: “Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path.”)

7. Are all OA groups alike?

The essence of the program is the same, but some groups are more structured and disciplined, while others are more individualized. They vary in size, demographics, recovery profiles, and formats. Where possible, newcomers are encouraged to attend several different meetings to find what works for them.

8. How does a person join OA?

No one “joins” in the usual sense of the word. There are no membership applications to fill out. Those who believe they have an eating problem may join simply by attending meetings. (Q & A, p. 7) “The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively....If you feel you are one of us, we welcome you with open arms.” (Many Symptoms, One Solution)

9. What does membership in OA cost? How is OA supported?

There are no membership dues or fees. Most local groups "pass the basket" to cover the group's expenses and to support our service bodies (Q & A, p 8).

10. Why are OA members anonymous?

Anonymity within the group means that OA principles are placed before personalities. It offers members assurance that their confidences will not be revealed. Anonymity at the level of public media ensures that egotism and self-glorification will not be the undoing of the OA fellowship. (About OA; Q & A, p. 13)

11. Are there many men in OA?

Based on a 1992 national survey, 14% of members were male, up from 9.2% in 1986.

12. Can young people join?

Yes. Sometimes they attend meetings open to all who have a desire to stop eating compulsively and sometimes they attend special meetings targeted for teens and young people. Special literature for young people can be gotten from World Service and youngsters can correspond & phone other young people. World Service facilitates young people pen pals.

13. Is OA affiliated with any other organizations?

No, OA is not affiliated with any other organizations of any sort. While someone's first contact with the program may come from a treatment facility, OA itself is not affiliated with treatment centers. (Group Handbook, p. 36, Treatment and Beyond, p. 2)

14. How did OA start?

OA was founded in Los Angeles, CA on January 19, 1960, with an initial meeting of three compulsive overeaters. Our Founder, Rozanne S., was assisted by the founder of Gamblers Anonymous in applying the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous to our particular compulsion. (Group Handbook, p. 34) From that first meeting, OA has grown until today there are thousands of meetings in the United States, Canada, and other countries throughout the world? (About OA)

15. What is the current membership?

There are currently 7,388 registered groups throughout the world. We do not know the precise number of individual members since we do not keep individual membership lists and it is difficult to project from the number of registered groups (Group size and attendance varies as well as the number of meetings a week members attend.)

16. How can professionals, family members, or friends of compulsive eaters help?

They can provide themselves and the compulsive eater with information and compassionate support regarding the disease and the OA program. Besides reading the literature, they can attend open OA meetings. Those who think they may be compulsive eaters are welcome at closed as well as open OA meetings. (Non-compulsive eaters may be admitted to closed meetings only with the knowledge and consent of group members: Group Handbook, p 18)