

# Difference between Abstinence and A Plan of Eating Workshop: Leaders Guide

---

## Workshop aim and objectives

Aim: To increase the Fellowship's focus on actions required for abstinence because our **primary purpose** is to abstain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors and to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps of OA to those who still suffer.

Workshop objectives include OA members:

- Understanding the difference between Abstinence and A Plan of Eating.
- Having a clear vision of their abstinence.
- Writing the actions they need to take to make abstinence 1st in their life.
- Understanding what A Plan of Eating is, and is not.
- Knowing about relevant OA resources.

## Resources needed

- Pens and writing paper for attendees
- Whiteboard or VERY large writing pad to attach to wall
- Masking tape or similar
- Whiteboard marker pens in at least four colors
- Handouts for attendees
- Examples of helpful literature (See list at end.)

## Workshop timing

Lengthen or shorten time allocated to each section as applicable for the group attending the workshop

1. Introductions – 10 minutes
2. Importance and background – 5 minutes
3. Brainstorming activity as a group – 30 minutes
4. Personal writing on abstinence – 15 minutes
5. Speaker sharing: Is my abstinence strong enough? – 30 minutes
6. Writing exercise: Abstinence 1st without exception – 1 hour (20 minutes writing time; 20 minutes to share in smaller groups; 20 minutes to share as whole group)
7. Open sharing: A Plan of Eating, what it is and isn't – 30 minutes
8. Display the resources – 10 minutes
9. Closing

## THE WORKSHOP

### Why is the difference between Abstinence and A Plan of Eating important?

The definition of abstinence is the same for all members, but the details of A Plan of Eating for each member may differ depending on what compulsive food behaviors we engaged in while practicing our disease, such as overeating, under-eating, and purging. A Plan of Eating is a Tool to help the OA member to maintain abstinence, i.e., to refrain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors and to work toward or maintain a healthy body weight. There are as many “plans of eating” in OA as there are members, and a plan may change over time for each member. *Dignity of Choice* has samples of some of the many plans of eating OA member’s use.

### Background

In 1961, Abstinence first mentioned as a Tool.

In 1973 the World Service Business Conference (WSBC) delegates approved *The Tools of Recovery* pamphlet, which included Abstinence as one of the Tools of OA.

By 1995 the collective OA understanding of the importance of Abstinence meant that the delegates at WSBC removed Abstinence as a Tool and replaced it with “A Plan of Eating,” leaving Abstinence as OA’s primary purpose

Delegates to the 2011 WSBC approved changes to the Statement on Abstinence and Recovery, which currently reads, “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 2013 at WSBC, our primary purpose was modified to say, “Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive eating and to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps of OA to those who still suffer.”

The results of a survey of the membership in 2013 showed that there was a lack of abstinence and of working all Twelve Steps. The strategic plan theme for World Service for 2014-2016 is “Our Primary Purpose.” The goals for each of these three years are: 2014—Increase Awareness of the Importance of Abstinence; 2015—Increase Awareness of the Necessity of Working All Twelve Steps; 2016—Increase Awareness of the Importance of Carrying the Message.

This Workshop was created as part of the 2014 goal.

In 2015 at WSBC, our primary purpose was modified to say, “Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors and to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps of OA to those who still suffer.”

### Brainstorming activity

*Purpose of activity:* to get workshop attendees recognizing and sharing about the difference between abstinence and A Plan of Eating

#### Instructions

- Invite workshop attendees to call out what they think of when they think of **abstinence**.
- Write these items on a whiteboard or large sheets of paper so all can see what’s been mentioned.
- Using three colored pens (different to that already used), circle
  - items related to abstinence in one color,
  - items related to plan of eating in another color, and
  - non-related items in another color.
- Open discussion, re. differences between Abstinence and A Plan of Eating

## Formulate your own abstinence vision/affirmation

*Pass out page 2 of handout.*

*(rather than all at once as it keeps attendees focused on current activity rather than being distracted)*

*Ask attendees to take 5 minutes to reflect on and create their own abstinence vision/affirmation.*

- E.g. I am freely choosing foods and food behaviors that are non-compulsive, eating with gratitude, dignity, and grace, which result in my maintaining a healthy body weight using God's wisdom and guidance and the Twelve Steps of OA as a path for my life.

*Invite two or three attendees to share about what they wrote.*

## Is my abstinence strong enough?

The threefold disease of compulsive eating is physical, emotional, and spiritual. Abstinence actions address all three aspects of the disease so peaceful long-term recovery is possible. The result of working all Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous is a spiritual awakening which changes us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

*SPEAKER(s): Have a speaker(s) share on their recovery using the following questions as prompts.  
Pass out page 3 of handout.*

- 1) Am I working the Steps?
- 2) Do I pray and meditate?
- 3) Did I plan my food today?
- 4) Am I maintaining or working toward a healthy body weight?
- 5) Did I rely on my Higher Power to get or stay abstinent?
- 6) Do I ask for help?
- 7) Do I make OA phone calls?
- 8) Do I have an attitude of gratitude?
- 9) Do I help others?
- 10) Do I have an action plan to stay abstinent?
- 11) Do I have a sponsor? Do I sponsor?
- 12) Is what I am currently doing working for me to remain abstinent?
- 13) What activities will I NOT participate in to maintain my abstinence?

## What actions do I take to make “Abstinence 1st without exception”?

*Get attendees to take 15 minutes to write their responses to the following questions  
Pass out page 4 of handout.*

What are my daily prayer and meditation actions?

- E.g. Have at least one period of prayer and meditation every day.
- E.g. Talk to God about specific food items and/or personal food behaviors.

What actions do I take to live Step Ten?

- E.g. Daily commit to list personal “did well”/positive attributes.
- E.g. Daily examine where have I been resentful, selfish, dishonest, or frightened.

What actions underlie my plan of eating?

- E.g. Get input from a health care professional to establish my SPECIFIC written plan of eating.
- E.g. Specify what foods will I eat and when will I eat them.

What are my TRIGGER FOODS that if I eat a little, I will crave more?

- E.g. Maintain a written list of trigger foods.
- E.g. Do not keep trigger foods near/visible.

Do I maintain a Specific Written List of Eating Behaviors that I will participate in?

- E.g. Will have at least \_\_\_\_\_ hours between meals.
- E.g. Will always communicate with sponsor before making changes in my food plan.

Do I maintain a Specific Written List of Eating Behaviors that I will NOT participate in?

- E.g. Will not eat in car.
- E.g. Will not eat/taste/sample anything while in the cooking process.

*Then*

*Have workshop attendee’s break into small groups for 20 minutes to share about what they have identified.  
Have someone from each small group take notes that can be reported back to the full group.*

## A Plan of Eating—what it is and is not

An effective Plan of Eating helps the member stop eating compulsively and move toward or maintain a healthy body weight. For a member to stay stopped requires more than just A Plan of Eating. Working the Twelve Steps and using the Tools of Recovery brings a return to sanity around food and a fuller recovery experience spiritually and emotionally.

*Instructions:*

*Get attendees to think back to some of the items we discussed earlier during our brainstorming activity and from their experience write briefly about what A Plan of Eating is or does:*

*Pass out page 5 of handout.*

**Examples include:**

- A Tool
- An individualized way of eating
- A calm rational balanced way of dealing with food
- Developed by an honest look at eating behaviors
- Eliminates personal binge/trigger foods
- Addresses the physical part of the disease
- A way of setting the food aside to clear the brain
- Defines what, when, how, where, and why we eat
- Can change over time

*Instructions:*

*Get attendees to think back to some of the items we discussed earlier during our brainstorming activity and from their experience write briefly about what A Plan of Eating is NOT or does NOT DO.*

**Examples include:**

- Our Primary Purpose
- Specific diet everyone follows
- A fast weight loss gimmick
- Doing what I can get away with
- About controlling binge foods
- The only thing required to recover
- A substitute for working the Twelve Steps
- Define who we are

## Take-home actions

- All attendees are asked to share one thing they could do before they pick up the first compulsive bite or action.
- Each suggestion is written on a whiteboard or paper sheets.
- Participants copy actions that work for them.

## Resources

OA approved resources to assist members to be abstinent and live free of the compulsive food behaviors include:

Pamphlets:

- *A Commitment to Abstinence*
- *A Plan of Eating: A Tool for Living*
- *Before You Take That First Compulsive Bite, Remember...*
- *Dignity of Choice*
- *Is Food a Problem for You?*
- *Maintaining a Healthy Weight*
- *Many Symptoms, One Solution*
- *Members in Relapse*
- *Questions and Answers*
- *Recovery Checklist*
- *The Tools of Recovery*
- *Think First*
- *Welcome Back*

Books:

- *Overeaters Anonymous, Third Edition*, specifically the Forewords and Appendices:  
“*The Role of a Plan of Eating in Recovery from Compulsive Eating*,” “*A Disease of the Mind*,” “*A Disease of the Body*,” and “*A Disease of the Spirit*”
- *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*
- *Abstinence, Second Edition*
- “*The Doctor’s Opinion*” from *Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition*

Free Downloads at oa.org:

- *Abstinence PowerPoint workshop*
- *Strong Abstinence Checklist*
- *Abstinence Literature Resource Guide*