

Physical Recovery



The Roving Reporter Asks...

In what ways have you experienced physical recovery since you joined OA?

I've always had sponsors who stressed the importance of physical recovery. One of my first sponsors maintains more than a 150 pound weight loss for more than 20 years. The analogy I was given is that if we are not progressing toward, or maintaining a healthy weight, then we are no different from alcoholics who continue to drink.

The last thing any addict ever wants to do is release the substance (or behavior) to which they are addicted. Yet, this is what we must find the power and willingness to do -- and we've all heard it said that this disease is cunning, baffling, and powerful. When I take step one each morning, I surrender, accepting that the battle is over -- the food won.

But there *is* a solution in the steps and tools of the program. Each day, I ask a power greater than myself for the willingness to eat only what has been determined to be a healthy plan of eating for me -- *SO THAT I CAN SHARE THE MIRACLE OF RECOVERY WITH OTHERS WHO ARE SUFFERING*. I need clear boundaries; I need know what constitutes abstinence for me (and what does NOT). Then, I need to be willing to go to ANY lengths, one day at a time (sometimes, one meal at a time -- or even one minute at a time) to walk through the feelings and face my stuff -- instead of stuffing my face. For me, anything less constitutes denial.

Being an addict, I'm unable to release even one morsel of food on my own; even after more than 24 years of abstinence, it still feels impossible. I email my food to my sponsor each day (and also report whether I've exercised). For many years of my recovery, this wasn't always necessary, but I've learned once again, that reporting my food removes the obsession, and helps me to be completely honest and to avoid those extra little things that don't contribute to my recovery.

I work the first three steps each morning and do my best to incorporate the 12 steps into my life; I read OA literature, work with a sponsor, and sponsor others. Without these tools, all I'd have is a diet -- and we all know how well they work! Before this program, I lost and regained HUNDREDS of pounds -- usually ten, twenty, or thirty at a time. But I NEVER had a sane moment of eating and at any given moment; I was either gaining or losing weight; bingeing or dieting -- and was completely obsessed about it. *And let's not even discuss the extent of the self-loathing!*

Now, I maintain a healthy body weight and can honestly say that I've "lost" hundreds of pounds of self-hatred, tons of ineffective ways of dealing with life and relationships, and massive amounts of misery. Of course, everything in my life is not perfect, but I've "gained" a life that is far better than anything I ever imagined possible for me. -- Jason B.

PS. My doctor assures me that with my family history, if I did *not* eat and exercise the way I do, I would undoubtedly follow in the footsteps of my mother, aunts, uncles, and cousins who have suffered amputations, blindness, kidney failure and premature death, as a result of diabetic complications. I'm grateful that I have a choice today.

More OAers' responses on back page....

I learned in the last year that I have used OA for "legal anorexia and restriction." Rather than face the foods I carried the most fear and shame about, I eliminated them from my food plan. I do not believe this is recovery for me. I can't eliminate all the people, places and things in my life that I have a more difficult time with and I feel the same holds true in my food plan. When I am centered spiritually, nothing, no one and no food can knock me off center. I want to recover from my eating disorder and restore a balanced relationship with food through integration, not avoidance. I am now finally able to allow myself to carry additional pounds, and embrace my female curves. It isn't always easy---actually not restricting certain foods is the hardest thing I've ever done in program. I'm living in the gray now, not the black and white, which in the past has been too scary for me. I am where I need to be for now and I'm so thankful the light bulb went off.

In addition, I had a severely disturbed digestive system. I would go almost 2 weeks between "movements." My body didn't want to process foods because it knew I was going to either throw it up, or possibly not eat much for a while. After lots of testing, stool softeners, and worrying about the ramifications of keeping toxic waste in my colon for so long, I have had a normal digestive system now for many years.

Lastly, I was on anti-depressant medications for 15 years, beginning at age 18. After years of 12-step recovery work and intensive self-examination, I have not needed medication for depression for almost 6 years. For that and everything else recovery is bringing me, I am abundantly grateful. --- Angela H.

I joined OA as I think many others did...to lose weight. What I found is that I have lost weight in program (probably a total of 15 pounds or so, maybe more. I was not significantly overweight at the time I joined because I had lost about 60 pounds with a commercial weight loss organization. The biggest deal for me? I have maintained my weight plus or minus about 5 pounds for over 11 years!!!! I have NEVER done anything for 11+ years, except eat compulsively. What an absolute miracle. Do you know I still have clothes that fit from 11 years ago? That is truly a gift from my HP and this program. Thanks OA! --- Melissa

I have been more overweight at other times in my life (up to 70lbs) than I was when I first came to OA about 4 1/2 years ago (about 15lbs overweight). But in addition to getting back to my ideal weight, the other aspects of physical recovery I have experienced are better sleep, better cardiovascular fitness, better circulation, and more energy, healthier skin, less body fat, less aching joints and foot pain, less acid reflux, and fewer interruptions in 'regularity'. I had never experienced the level of health I enjoy now. Among my challenges now are to continue to improve my conscious contact with God to avoid "resting on my laurels" (BB Pg. 85). --- Brian G.

Physical recovery in OA has helped me to grow mentally and emotionally into a smaller body, and a willingness to move that body and actually enjoy exercise. An OA member told me that for her, she had to have a group of people expecting her to be there regularly for regular exercise work for her. At that time I was struggling with being too wrapped up in someone else's life; my prayer was for God to show me how to make my world bigger. Walking half marathons for a charity was my answered prayer.

I am maintaining a forty pound weight loss in OA and lived often disconnected from the neck down. I still struggled with old character defects of slothfulness. I wasn't sure how to apply the Steps to physically living in my body. The Steps and this being a program of action helped me to live with more movement, with more social outlets, with another way to be of service, and a greater spiritual connection with my Higher Power and my physical self. RGM

" I came into OA about 25 lbs. overweight and since getting abstinent about 2 years ago, I've maintained that weight loss quite easily ... it seems that the weight was just a symptom of the underlying "unfit spiritual condition" I was carrying around and once I got a regular prayer and meditation life, the rest was simple.... I keep going to meetings, stay in touch with my sponsor, write and read literature daily ... as we say in the program, "... it works if you work it." ... Now that I've maintained abstinence for a while, I've decided to grow in the program by expanding my service work and do the 12th Step more seriously. ... Next month, I begin volunteering in a State Prison here in Nashville; I plan to take my spiritual program to the inmates on a regular basis ... I know that the more I share my Higher Power's Love for all of us, the more I'll grow in the program. As I continue to look for ways to share the love and kindness of this fellowship, I know more opportunities will come my way ... it's a "law" of attraction that as we sow, so shall we reap. Love, Jerry R.

The Roving Reporter "roves" via e-mail. If you would like to receive the question of the month and have opportunity to respond, e-mail b.brown8@comcast.net.

Notes of Hope is a bi-monthly newsletter for the Middle Tennessee Intergroup. Contact Pam B. at b.brown8@comcast.net to submit an article or announcement. Deadline for the May/June issue is April 15, 2007.
