



## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

# Food Addiction and Compulsive Eating Groups

These groups bring together people who experience their relationship with food or eating as compulsive, out of control, and distressing. The idea of food addiction is contested: it's not a DSM-5 diagnosis, and researchers disagree on whether addiction applies to food. Still, many people live with compulsive eating or restrict-binge cycles that feel unmanageable, and these programs offer support. Four 12-Step fellowships serve this group, each with its own definition of food sobriety: OA, FA, FAA, and CEA-HOW.

## WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- A fit for those who identify with food addiction and want structured accountability.
- Strict food-plan programs can be contraindicated with a history of restriction or orthorexia.
- Not a sole treatment for active anorexia or medical complications. Call or text 988.

## What it's for

People who experience eating as compulsive or out of control, including binge eating.

OA welcomes any disordered relationship with food and prescribes no set food plan.

FA, FAA, and CEA-HOW are more structured, with specific food plans.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

**1** Meetings run 60 to 90 minutes in the 12-Step format, in person and online.

**2** OA is open sharing; structured programs add reports on abstinence and sponsor contact.

**3** Sponsorship is central, often with daily phone contact in structured programs.

## Direct research on these programs is limited but emerging.

- A 2021 review found most food-addiction help came from **12-Step self-help groups**, with little controlled research so far.<sup>1</sup>
- A 2021 paper on OA for binge eating found it **fosters connection and belonging** and may reduce bingeing, while urging more study.<sup>2</sup>

## MAKING THE MOST OF IT

**Match the program to your history.** Strict food plans aren't right for everyone.

**Loop in your care team.** Especially before any specific food-plan program.

**Lean on the sponsor.** Daily contact is the scaffolding early on.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1 Which program is it, and does it require a specific food plan?
- 2 How much sponsor contact does it expect?
- 3 Has my treatment team weighed in if I have an eating disorder?

## Ready to find a group?

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**If you're in crisis, call or text 988.**

The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact. Sources on page 2.



## Sources

Food Addiction and Compulsive Eating Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Leary, M., Pursey, K. M., Verdejo-Garcia, A., & Burrows, T. L. Current intervention treatments for food addiction: a systematic review. *Behavioral Sciences* (2021), 11(6), 80.
- 2 Bray, B., Rodríguez-Martín, B. C., Wiss, D. A., Bray, C. E., & Zwickey, H. Overeaters Anonymous: an overlooked intervention for binge eating disorder. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2021), 18(14), 7303.

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