

# Managing the worst conditions

What would be the worst nightmare for a compulsive overeater with a sweet tooth, who's self-conscious about her body? How about:

1. standing in front of hundreds of people to give a presentation in a room full of baked goods?
2. trying to be professional and look good without obsessing about the sweet smell invading my senses?
3. doing this in a school gymnasium, no less (the ultimate bad dream territory)?

Yep, that would be a complete nightmare, at least before I found the anchor of secular OA. Luckily, I did find it, because that horror was real.

With six months abstinent, facing those conditions was so much easier than I'd have thought! "Past me" would have been able to do the presentation, sure – I'm a professional after all. But, I would have suffered every inch up that nightmare-Mount-Everest, and I would have fallen on my face, rolling in sugar all the way down.

Luckily, "Present me" had tools that were tried and tested in the community of secular OA, the support of my fellows, and some recently-regained confidence. Here's how I prepared for, and managed, the worst conditions.

As soon as I heard this was the task required of me, I allowed myself a tiny freak-out. This included instant outreach, vigorously texting my accountability buddy and a non-OA friend. Since they know me and are always supportive, I trusted them when they told me I could do it. They also told me that it was actually pretty cool that I was asked to do this and that I must be good at my job to get the opportunity. I hadn't even thought about that! I dropped the freak-out after about 5 minutes. I was still nervous, but after allowing those first feelings of panic I could focus on the task at hand.

During the weeks until the big day, I continued with my regular program: I ate according to my food plan, had my check-ins with my sponsor and my accountability buddy, went to 2-3 secular OA meetings each week, and did service in and out of meetings. While everyday life went on, I kept to my original plan of one day at a time, and at the same time made a plan for the trip and the presentation. Since I'm an atheist, I didn't pray; I couldn't hand this over to a deity. Instead, I vented my insecurities with friends and fellows and asked for practical advice from the community of wise humans in Secular OA.

While packing, I stopped thinking about what I should wear and what people would think about my body in those clothes. Instead, I chose an outfit that I felt comfortable in, adding socks with cats on them and a nerdy pin on my jacket, because that's just more me! I packed my healthy snacks and emergency food – to be ready if I ended up stranded in a desert of fast-food or convenience stores packed with candy.

One thing I'm always anxious about when speaking in public, is what to do with my hands. The answer in the aromatic hell of the high school was, "whatever's not pastry!". Holding a pen is also a good call. The event was hard; I was nervous; I white-knuckled some moments and laughed through others. I book-ended the event with my community of fellows, sending a chat before and after. I kept a couple of episodes of a secular podcast in my pocket, just as an emergency meeting. I didn't need it, but it was nice to have it there, just in case. In the end, I made it through with my abstinence and sanity intact!

After this ordeal, climbing that Everest, I got a bit high on relief and praise from my colleagues, a familiar feeling set in: now what? I want to celebrate, I did so good, I want to eat, I deserve it! Well, preparing is caring! I knew this feeling would come, since it always does. Therefore, I had a good book waiting for me back at the hotel to keep me busy. I had booked a massage for when I got home, to celebrate in a healthy way, by taking care of my body and finally relaxing. Another way to celebrate is to share this story, writing it down while it's fresh in my mind and sharing my win with all of you! I'm so lucky to have found a community that "gets me" and that has taught me what works for them, so I could figure out what works for me.

What is your nightmare? Your mountain to climb? Whatever it is, I know you can do it! And you can do it even better with the help of a community that understands and supports you, like Secular OA. Remember to laugh about the craziness of it all, prepare, prepare and prepare. You know deep down what your strengths and weaknesses are, use that information. You got this!

- Reluctant speaker, happy writer