

Secular OA Appeared When I Needed It Most

Since about age twelve I've been addicted to food, but even though I realized I was becoming increasingly overweight and unhealthy, I didn't realize I had an addiction until I was in my early sixties.

Over the course of six decades I tried Weight Watchers and many diets, and my weight yoyoed many times. I lived in the perpetual cycle of overeating and self-loathing. Even after I had recognized that I had an addiction, it took me several more years—plus a lot more pounds and increasingly alarming health markers—to speak up and ask my doctor for help to tackle the problem. And when I asked, in early 2022, he truly heard me. After listening to me describe all the approaches I had tried and failed at, he suggested I address my compulsive overeating by taking a medication that would gently curb my cravings.

At the same time, he suggested I seek a support group. I attended several OA meetings, but the “god” language proved to be a barrier to my participation. My belief system and conscience would not allow me to surrender my agency in the recovery process. I also found the rules on what materials could be read or even mentioned at meetings to be very restrictive, because I was drawn to scientific studies and science-based resources that examine the chemical, psychological, and emotional aspects of eating, and I wanted to discuss them with others.

One day, while searching online for resources for a family member dealing with alcoholism, I stumbled across secular AA. A lightbulb went off in my brain and I thought “Hmm, if there's a secular AA, maybe there's a secular OA”—and there is! Through open-minded inquiry and many solid alternatives to traditional resources, the secular community has given me a wealth of information to choose from in pursuing my recovery.

At the first secular meeting I attended, a participant mentioned that she had been abstinent from sugar and flour for three years. My first thought was, “I could never do that.” But over the next few days I thought to myself several times, “Maybe I *could* do that. Maybe I can put down the sugar and flour and not pick them up again.” And by the time the next meeting rolled around, I had made my decision. I've been abstinent for nearly two years, and I now consider myself to be sober. I'm maintaining a very healthy weight and have never felt better.

The medication my doctor had prescribed, which I took for six months, allowed my brain to heal. It gave me the opportunity to break my compulsive food habits and create new habits of intentional healthy eating. The other key factor to my recovery has been the knowledge I've gained through the resources and sharing at the meetings I've attended for the past two years. The fellowship has solidified my commitment to my health and wellbeing. Participating in recovery circles and accountability relationships has added friendship and even more intimate support to the work that I do on my own. I am profoundly grateful to the entire secular community.

- Janet M.