



Meal
PLANNING

OA Desert Recovery

May & June 2016

NEWSLETTER@OASOUTHERNAZ.ORG

(My) Plan of Eating... While on the Road

My growth around my food plan while traveling has been an incremental process and didn't happen overnight. Early in my recovery, a vacation was... well, a vacation. **I would try to make good food choices**, but I wouldn't do much planning ahead. So, when I stopped for a meal, I would do one of two things. I would succumb to eating an old favorite, which even if healthy was too much for one meal. Or, I would choose a healthier alternative and even leave some food on the plate, but feel resentful and deprived.

When food was my focus, I didn't have much fun. Obsessing about the next meal was a constant, and traveling "abstinent" was a chore. Even if there had been a pamphlet "How to Eat Abstinely While on the Road," I probably wouldn't have followed many of the suggestions.

This is what I do today--**I have a general food plan** given to me by a dietitian several years ago that I've memorized.

When I'm home I email a food plan daily to my sponsor. I have also written out a weekly menu plan to help me make a sane grocery shopping list. When I travel, I use a similar plan for shopping ahead and/or when I get to my destination. I usually have a general idea of how many meals I'll be eating out and which ones I'll have on my own.

If driving, I pack a cooler and a shopping bag of dry goods to take along. Things like breakfast cereal can be pre-measured in serving-sized portions and stored in small containers. The cooler has plenty of fresh fruit, containers of pre-cut raw veggies and bottled water, as well as some healthy protein choices.

If I'm flying, I can usually find a healthy salad in the airport if I need a meal there. I usually turn down the free snacks on the plane. **I pack a copy of my food plan and a blank weekly menu planner.** When I've determined where and when I'll be eating my meals, I make

arrangements to shop for groceries at my destination and/or find local restaurants that serve meals that are safe for me.

Without my cooler, I try to arrange for refrigerator space if it is not provided, and I need it. For me, **it's a matter of planning ahead, and staying flexible**, but sane. I stay open. I often learn by making mistakes, and traveling is a great opportunity for that. I know people who, for health reasons, have very structured food plans. One friend makes food for the entire trip ahead of time, freezes it in meal-sized containers, and packs it in an insulated cooler or suitcase for transport. Others I know trust themselves and HP entirely. We all find what works for us.

Abstinent travel has become a welcome adventure, and an ongoing learning experience. I get to focus my attention more on the people and activities I'm there for, rather than the old obsession with food.

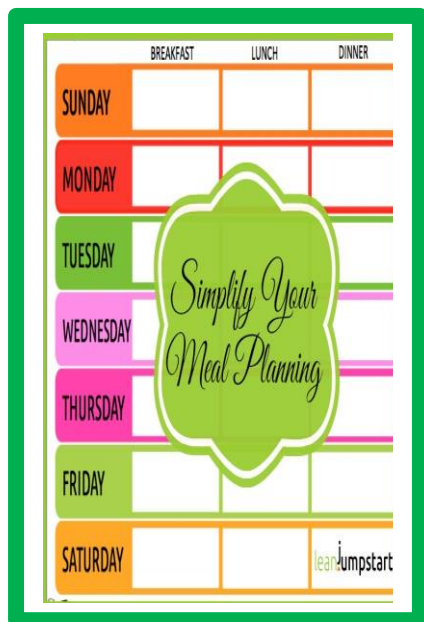
Neva



Sept.1-4, 2016
World Service Convention
Boston, MA.

Sept. 9-11, 2016
Region 3 Fall Assembly
Austin, TX.'

Annual OA Fall Retreat
October 28-30, 2016
Theme: "Alive In Recovery"
Holy Trinity Monastery,
St. David, AZ.



A God-Directed Food Plan

When I came into program 12 years ago, I was pretty much eating the things I eat today. I was having issues with eating between designated meals and eating foods that triggered my compulsion to want to overeat. I had previously worked at changing my plan of eating/diet (daily dietary food plan). I had been using and I still am using nutritional products and meal replacement supplements in my plan.

What has changed is how I think about and approach food. I have realized through the help of my sponsor and the other tools of the OA program that **I need to have a plan**. I need to know what foods I can have on hand and which foods need to stay at the store. I need to daily plan and prepare the foods I am going to eat; and I need a plan for when my routine changes.

Through working the steps and admitting my powerlessness over food, I have come to understand that **I need my Higher**

Power's input. I need to pray and seek His will for me. I need to cultivate an ongoing dialogue. When things changed in my work schedule, I found I needed to be willing to eat my lunch at a different time.

I start work at 6 AM. My first and only break is at 8:15 AM. I usually work five to six hours before I am able to go home. I was concerned that if I ate my breakfast at 4:15-4:30 AM and "lunch" at 8:15 AM, that I would be setting myself up to overeat daily. How was I going to get through the hours between "lunch" and dinner?

I had to be willing to trust God with this dilemma. I can and do over think things. Daily, I ask God, "What should I do?" Then I do what I feel He says. Some days I don't eat my lunch on my break. Those days I have left by 11 AM and I have been able to eat my lunch in the normal 12 noon to one o'clock time frame.

I don't know the future and I don't have the ability on my own to not compulsively eat. God has shown me that He can be trusted to supply all my needs, if I will just seek His will.

Darlyn

ONE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT

As I approached Step 6, I had so much fear that I would fail to do it correctly because I knew that I had no control over my character defects. I had a problem with my temper, enjoyed the occasional gossip session, and could be a harsh judge of others. I thought I had so many character flaws, I couldn't see how I would ever rid myself of them.

*I tightly held my sponsor's hand as she led me through the early Steps and I started to see **all I had to do was become ready for God to remove those defects**. I was not the one doing the heavy lifting here---God was. When I was finally ready to give those flaws to God, I saw great improvements---not perfections. I still deal with my defects every day, but I rarely lose my temper. When I do, I make amends as soon as I become aware of the transgression.*

*The essential ingredient in becoming ready to give these things to God was spiritual growth. I needed to grow in the understanding that I was not the one with the power to remove my defects. **Only God has that power**. That was a huge change in perception for me. Before, I would try using my own inadequate power to make changes, and I would always fail. This failure was a constant source of frustration. Lucky for me, I had meetings and a sponsor. They gave me suggestions, and I actually followed some of them.*

*The first five Steps led me to the trust and spiritual experience that I needed to comprehend that God had a better way and I could trust Him to do the hard work. I had to do my part, and then He would take it from there. **What an awesome experience watching God work in my life!** He has used people, places and things to teach me tremendous life lessons.*

My fear of the Sixth Step was born of skewed perception. By the Grace of God alone, I was relieved of that fear. I am blessed to see the things God can do when I give up trying to run the show.
 Kelly J.



HEAVY LOAD LIFTED

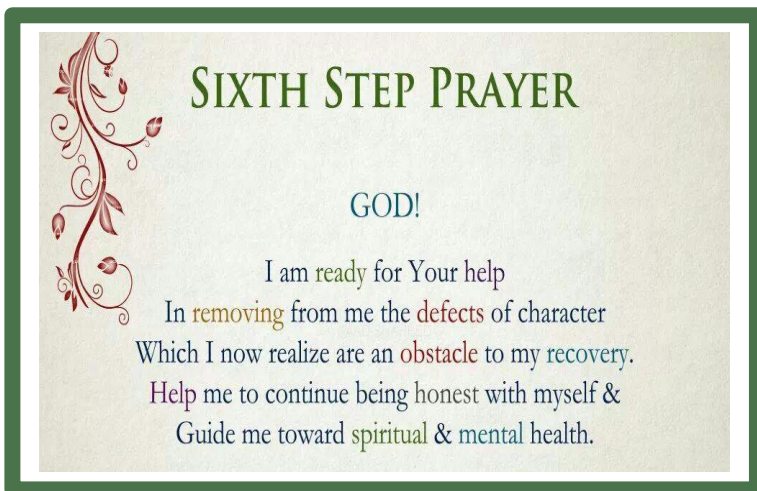
Why is Step 5 necessary? The Big Book gives us “The best reason first: **If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome [our addiction]**” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed., p. 72). Not overcoming my addiction to food means returning to a body I hate, clothes that don't fit, bad hygiene, abandonment of relationships and work commitment. It also means going back to a life of misery, hopelessness and loneliness. To me, those are good, motivating reasons to follow through with this Step.

As a compulsive overeater, I lived a double life—in fact, I was a chameleon. In many different relationships, I played out many different personalities. I was “very much the actor....want[ing] to enjoy a certain reputation” (Big Book, page 73). I knew in my heart this reputation was undeserved, so offstage I pushed that knowledge and my fears down with food. It was an exhausting existence trying to be someone else all of the time. I was in a constant state of dread, fearing that cracks would appear and people would see who I really was. I wanted to be loved to the extreme by everyone who knew me, but the truth was I didn't even know me. **I lacked all humility**. When I was thin, I was God's gift to the human race, and when I was fat, I was God's mistake.

After writing my Step 4, I shared it all with my sponsor. I knew only a full disclosure would save me. **It was the first time I had ever been entirely honest with someone** about the exact nature of my wrongs. In the past, I gave only snippets of truth and held back anything that implicated me. But here in this Step, with a trusted sponsor who had also walked this walk, I was “illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past” (Big Book, page 75). There were embarrassing and scary moments, but I continued to read aloud, humbling myself before God and this other person.

The first time I took Step 5 had such a huge impact---I had an overwhelming sense of peace and ease. This extraordinarily heavy load lifted from my strained and weary body. God was real, and he felt so close that fear was almost a stranger. **It was the beginning of a new way of life**. Each day I practice the gift of sharing and speak with my sponsor and friends in recovery. Secrets, big and small, will only take me back in the food, and I never want to visit there again.

Working this program of recovery one day at a time, I have achieved over three years of abstinence. OA has changed my life because it changed me into the person I believe I was meant to be. No longer do I need to hate myself. Through this OA program and my Higher Power, **I have learned to love myself and have come to believe not only that I deserve love, but I am worth it!**
 Sacha E.



IT WORKS IF YOU WORK IT

You probably know the old adage, “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” I learned first-hand it is true. During a five-week trip to the East Coast two years ago, I tested that saying in many ways, and **the only time I didn’t have a plan in place is when I got into trouble with food.**

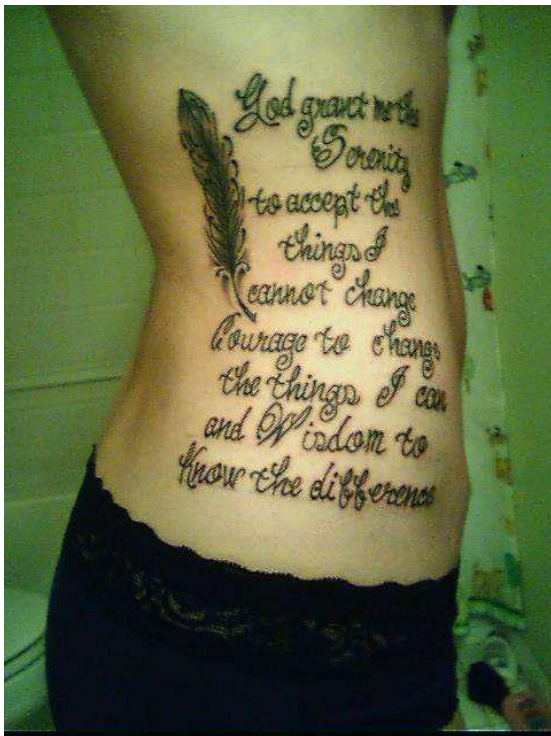
My husband’s sister was about to have surgery and would need supervised after-care, so we decided to drive. I had great anxiety about the logistics of a long car trip as I planned the route we would drive and probable locations for nightly motel stays. My biggest worry was how we would manage meals and the availability/cost of healthy food, so I made lists of what I thought we would need. I figured how many meals we would eat in a restaurant, and about how much food we could reasonably carry in an ice cooler. **I had so many doubts about our plans that I prayed for guidance** and the next day I woke up with an urge to return to a store where I had already shopped for the trip. Walking in the door I saw a display of camping supplies, featuring an electric cooler that could be also be plugged into a car’s dash for power. I immediately bought it.

I took our dog to the vet for routine shots, only to learn she was 10 pounds overweight and needed a prescription-food diet. I was advised to stop feeding her “table food” and to exercise her more. I felt guilty for having contributed to her extra weight and vowed to get her healthy and back into shape while on the trip, hoping that having to weigh and measure her food would help me do the same with mine. **I also figured that having to exercise the dog at regular intervals would aid my physical recovery---a win for both of us.**

The trip went well and the electric cooler allowed us to carry whatever we needed for breakfast and lunch, and even a few frozen items in a special compartment. Stops at a chain store kept us supplied with fresh fruit/veggies, and motel rooms with a microwave allowed us to cook a few things to take along. When we arrived at our destination, we agreed the cooler had been a worthwhile purchase. When my sister-in-law was well enough for us to leave, we visited relatives in nearby

states. We limited the visits to one relative’s home each day and ate only one major meal with them, so the dog and I were able to loosely stay on our food plans. All went well, until we got to Ohio for a mini family reunion, only to find my elderly sister had just gone into renal failure and was in critical condition. I spent three days in a waiting room outside a critical care unit while doctors literally tried to save her life from complications of diabetes. Food was mostly obtained from hospital vending machines or a nearby fast-food restaurant. When the crisis was averted, we felt it was safe to begin traveling home.

When we were five days from home, I weighed myself. To my dismay I had gained eight pounds over four weeks of travel, but the dog had lost six! **I immediately returned to my meal plan** and the cooler again helped me have only healthy food available. As we traveled I wrote about the journey and what I had eaten. I recalled poor food choices at relatives’ homes, more snacks than usual, and an enormous amount of sugar and fat during the hospital vigil. I also realized I had frequently failed to ask God for guidance about my food, and had almost demanded He save my sister’s life. I vowed to do better in all areas of my life/OA program. When we arrived at home, my commitment to my meal plan was firmly in place. It took six weeks of clean eating and exercise to lose the eight pounds, but this time I remembered to thank God, my sponsor and my home group for their support. The slogan about our program really is true---**it works if I work it, and I am worth it.** Peggy P.



Did you know there are more verses to this prayer?

The next two verses will be printed in the July/August issue of the newsletter.

WORKING TOWARD A SOLUTION

My disease speaks with a loud, commanding, derogatory tone. Before program, a perpetual argument with the disease filled my mind. A tennis court existed in my head, where I was a ball sailing back and forth from bingeing to starving. As the voice's volume and power grew, my attempts to quiet the chatter consumed me. By age 30, I suffered from emotional, physical and spiritual exhaustion (though I didn't know about the latter at the time). I tried to fix the problem by seeking help from books, pills, doctors or anything that would deflect the focus from me. If I fixed the food, I would be fine, but **the food was just how this conflict presented itself.**

The true problem was me and my abandonment of my morals, ideals and God. Now I'm grateful to be a food addict. Before OA, I had a closet stocked full of shame, anger and self-pity. I blocked any guidance from HP and a spiritual life, something I had no idea I needed. I must have directives to guide me in living: I cannot stay in my head. I have found these in program through HP, the 12 Steps and the OA group. I believe the directives were always there for me, but I refused to listen.

Seeking help everywhere but inside myself distracted me. It is different now. **Higher Power and the group take care of me in a way I could never do myself.** I need to remember the importance of staying focused on spirituality, and to remember that I have a disease. I do this by focusing on my program as my ultimate source of authority and not being distracted from outside sources of the disease chatter. This means attending meetings, working the Steps and taking care of myself so I can be a fully functional person when I leave the rooms. I can only do that by OA's commitment to keep our focus on the primary purpose.

Tradition 6 provides us with guidance in disallowing outside things to divert our addict minds elsewhere.

We need solidarity as a group. Without it our foundation would be shaky, and the calm serenity I feel at program events would not exist. I rely on that focus to be number in OA because it keeps my commitment, role and grateful attitude intact. In the disease, my impulsive nature to go toward the next shiny, bright thing distracted me. By keeping the focus on what we are here to do instead of other enterprises, we can recover and help other addicts recover. T.N.

Tradition 5—Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.

Tradition 6—An OA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

KEEPING FOCUSED WITH THE TRADITIONS

*Traditions 5 & 6 go hand in hand. Tradition 5 defines our group purpose: to carry the message, and then Tradition 6 tells us what we must do to protect our message from getting lost. Examples I have read in AA program literature seem extreme to me today, **but I am grateful that AA members went down those difficult roads so we OA's don't have to.** The problems I see with these Traditions are subtle and hard to define, but questions at the end of the chapter on Tradition 6 in OA's Twelve and Twelve bring home their fine points to me. They ask us to look deeply to see if we're confusing newcomers by addressing things that are not OA or misusing the connections we've made in OA by using them for financial gain.*

*Sometimes we find it difficult to maintain these Traditions. OA brings us such full and interesting lives. We want to share our discoveries with the group. I find it difficult to keep my personal spiritual journey and self-discoveries strictly in the OA context. **But now I can see how important it is to maintain focus** no matter what type of group I'm in. For example, my primary purpose at work is to work. When I get caught up in gossip or idle chatter, it keeps me from working. I am out of alignment with my primary purpose and Higher Power's will for me. This results in feelings of guilt and decreased productivity that wind up on a Fourth Step. By maintaining focus in each situation, I can remain appropriate to the moment and avoid behaviors that Higher Power and I will have to clean up later.*

*I challenge each of you to study the Traditions and see how they help us live cleanly in the world. In my experience, getting abstinent is about putting down the food. **Staying abstinent is about cleaning up the messes and living a clean life** so I don't need to eat compulsively to push life away. I feel grateful for a program and a Fellowship that make that possible.* Ethel M.

We have an on-going need for stories, articles, poetry and original artwork to be published in the newsletter. Issues are bi-monthly, published in the odd-numbered months, and deadline for each issue is always the 5th of that month. In 2016, we would like to **focus on the Tools of Recovery**. For the July/August edition, we will feature: **Writing and Literature**. The co-chairs meet weekly to edit items received and need submissions to be as early as possible.

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A FREEDOM FROM FOOD OBSESSION

I try to use as many of the nine tools of the program as possible on a daily basis, but the Plan of Eating tool especially resonates with me. **It allows me freedom to stop thinking about food all day long** and permits me time to do things I didn't previously have time for or wouldn't take the time to do. I think it has helped me become a "grown up" in the way people not addicted to food lead their lives. After 18 years of working the OA program, I finally feel connected to the rest of my world when meal time rolls around. That doesn't mean I eat the same food, but I now can sit next to or among "normal people" at a meal and feel like I am normal too. But, it took a lot of work and growth on my part---physically, emotionally and spiritually---to attain this hard-fought-for goal.

After attending meetings and trying to work the program on my own for about nine months, **I was finally willing to find a sponsor.** She asked me to write down what I was actually eating every day, call her at night to tell her, and discuss how I could do better the next day. After two months of nightly calls she had helped me work out a basic daily Plan of Eating, and then we worked on making the plan flexible to accommodate what I termed "real life interruptions." She taught me to carry a healthy snack in my purse and in my car, so I wouldn't be tempted to go through a restaurant drive-in or stop at a gas station candy counter when I was tempted to eat between meals during my work day.

In using this planning tool, I was amazed to find a new freedom from my food obsession. I no longer skipped breakfast for a mid-morning bag of donuts to inhale, I by-passed fast-food stores for a lunch of something heavy in fats and carbs to eat while driving. I stopped standing in front of the fridge after a long work day, wondering what to fix for dinner, and then giving in to exhaustion or laziness by settling for something sweet/frozen or crunchy/salty. I no longer had the desire to keep grazing until bedtime. Instead, every morning I knew what I would be eating for the whole day because I had planned it the previous night. Gradually, I was able to make a meal plan for a whole week, and take it with me when I went food shopping—and to buy only what was on the list. I learned to do a lot of prep work for meals when I had free time in the evenings or on weekends. **Fear that there would not be "enough" to satisfy me began to disappear** when my "internal thermometer" resurfaced and made me realize my stomach was full, that I didn't have to keep eating even if there was still food on my plate.

Instead of praying to my Higher Power to let the food I was eating be enough, I began praying for guidance in making my meal plan and for strength to stick to my food shopping list in the stores where so many tempting and addictive options were available. **At meal times I only gave thanks for what I was about to eat, knowing it would be enough to satisfy me.** Just as our program literature promised, I began to know a sense of peace and a new happiness, worries became more manageable though they did not entirely leave me alone. If I became anxious and I was tempted to eat something not on my meal plan, I now had other program tools to help me cope. I could reach for program literature instead of food, call my sponsor or an OA friend for support, go to a meeting, ask HP for help, write about it and put my feelings on paper rather than in my mouth.

For someone who earned a living as a newspaper/magazine writer for many years, the writing tool should have come easily to me, but it did not. Somehow, seeing my feelings in black and white reminded me of police records from my reporting days and made me feel like a "food criminal" for all my bad eating behavior over the years. My sponsor suggested using the writing tool in a positive way by addressing my thoughts to my Higher Power and asking for guidance in revealing patterns of addictive behavior, showing the progress I am making in my recovery, and reminding me I am not alone in dealing with my food issues. **So, I begin my daily food journaling by writing, "Dear God....,"** go on from there, and end with a prayer of thanks for the blessings in my life. My Higher Power, this OA program, the Plan of Eating and other tools have helped me to achieve abstinence and maintain it to the best of my ability for many years. The growth that I have experienced physically, emotionally and spiritually has resulted in finding that sense of peace and new happiness promised in the literature. We read that "God can and will do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves." I know it is true. I am a living example.

Leigh