

Literature Committee Attachment 1

Outline and Sample Chapters for *Living Abstinent*

Introduction

In 1975, Alcoholics Anonymous published a booklet called *Living Sober*. In it, many alcoholics shared how they stayed sober. Staying sober, after all, is the basis of recovery from alcoholism. Many of us in Greysheeters Anonymous agree with that premise, that learning how to live without binging, starving, grazing or whatever form of abuse our eating takes is the basis of our recovery from food addiction. Using the *Living Sober* booklet as a guide to living in recovery, we have put together our own booklet called *Living Abstinent*.

Most of us have had many years of recovery in Greysheeters Anonymous (GSA). Everything that is written in this booklet is based on our experience. In the first couple of years of our recovery, the practical aspects of abstinence became our focus. For most of us, it was similar to learning a new language. In other words, it was hard work and took lots of practice every day. Unlike the disease of alcoholism in which recovery means a total abstaining from alcohol, food addicts must eat. Not only did we have to avoid places that carried foods that were poison to us, we had to learn how to shop in grocery stores, how to stick to a shopping list, how to deal with parties and buffet dinners, how to live with people who loved us but didn't understand the extreme nature of our disease and much, much more.

We have broken down this booklet into chapters that address many of those issues. We have reached out to the GSA community for their experience. What you will read in the following chapters is the gathered experience, strength and hope shared in meetings or written to us at our request

Most of us have found that addressing these everyday problems becomes second nature to us. We have found that living abstinent is not a restriction or sacrifice. We have learned to have fun at parties and with life in general. We no longer focus on how to get our "fix" but on the company we keep. We have a new curiosity about people and life. We have begun to realize that there is no end, no limits to our growth and learning. It is up to us. We are each different,

have a chance at finding ourselves and turning to whatever sources attract us as we grow. What we have in common is a life and death disease called Compulsive Eating or Food Addiction. What we have experienced in common is living in the hell of compulsively over or under eating. We will go to any lengths to help each other never to have a reason to return to that hell.

We want to share all this with you.

CHAPTER 1 What do I say or do at a party that's all about food?

Grey sheet Anonymous has many wonderful slogans and expressions that help the new and old member navigate what can be dangerous events for the Compulsive Eater. As a new person

entering into abstinence with GSA and recovery from compulsive eating, almost impossible for us to believe or think any party or event was not all about the food. These were often the places that we would continue a binge in progress or start our next binge or just continue to graze on endless amounts of food. The following shares from other GSA members we hope will bring some experience, strength, and hope as they share how they navigate these possibly dangerous and difficult situations for the new and sometimes older member of GreySheet Anonymous. Following are ways members of GSA members have stayed abstinent without exception. It is our hope that these shares help you stay abstinent one day at a time NMW.

- One member shared I don't go to events that are all about food such as cooking classes or wine tasting. Few events are really "all about" the food. Food is just a big part of most social events. If I have a good, unrelated to food reason to be there—such as seeing family or friends, supporting a cause, spending time with clients—I go and attend to that aspect. I talk to people about subjects other than what's on the menu.
 - Usually I ask people about themselves—everyone loves to talk about themselves. I don't hang around the buffet table and I don't usually participate in preparing, serving, or clearing people's food. And this has been when am in fit spiritual condition. Unless it's a sit-down meal where everyone is eating at the same time, I can usually manage to avoid the questions about why I am not eating or why I am eating what I brought or why I am weighing the served food. At a sit-down meal, where I am the only one not eating or eating something different, I cheerfully answer all questions with, "I would love to tell you all about it if you ask me again AFTER the meal." And then turn my eyes back to my food. In 24 years, I can't remember a single person asking me later.
 - Slogans that apply here are "Keeping your eyes on your own plate." "WDENMW"
- This member shares: What I have done is skip those events that are around food and I will not go hungry. So, I often time my arrival so I will eat before the event or have my food prepared so I can time my leaving with my meal waiting. If it is a wedding or some event you cannot miss, then doing what is called book ending will be very helpful: calling someone before you go and when I leave offers me a point of accountability. Taking my food so I am able to eat while others are eating, keep a diet beverage or water in my hand so I don't have a free hand create a pause for myself, stay away from the table with the food, make it about the people there and not about the food. Carrying a 911 card with you to use in those NMW situations. It includes 1. Asking HP to remove the obsession 2. List of phone numbers of people who answer and you have set up a 911 contact so they know if you text 911 it is a food emergency. 3. Phone number of a meeting that you could get on. 4. Exact directions on what to do including WDENMW!
 - Slogans that might apply here are "There is always another meal coming", "there is always a solution", "this too will pass". "Share it or wear it" or any other slogans that will help you. If there is any doubt that you are on shaky ground and might eat stay away! Nothing is worth eating over.

- In another members first week of abstinence they chose to skip a party that they were invited to because they thought they were vulnerable and overwhelmed by the thought of all the food. They were sincere and honest about it when they sent the RSVP and I experienced understanding and support from the host. Since then they have never experienced being too vulnerable at this kind of event. They looked at the food as images of something beautiful, that is ok for me to admire but would never put in my mouth. As an additional safeguard they usually make sure they have their own transportation so they can leave if it becomes too difficult.
 - Slogans that apply possibly are “that is not my food”, “take what you want and leave the rest”, “nothing tastes as good as abstinence feels.”
 - In the beginning of our abstinence, many of us choose to skip parties that were all about the food. We are new and too vulnerable. For instance, I belonged to a Book Club when I got abstinent. It became obvious to me after 2 months that the members were much more interested in drinking and talking about food than in discussing the book. I was more interested in that as well until I got abstinent. So, I made a decision to stop attending that book study. I skipped a big party and a wedding in my first two months.
 - I just wasn’t sure how I would handle it and my sponsor said, “When in doubt, leave it out”.
 - I did feel a little sorry for myself and would call people share my thoughts and feelings.
 - Everyone said that I was doing great by putting my abstinence first and they promised it would get easier. They were right. The slogans that fit here: “we can do what I cannot”, “when in doubt leave it out”, “what other people think of me is none of my business”.
- What this member has learned is if it’s not an outright sit-down dinner party it is likely no one will even notice I am not eating. If asked questions about my food intake, or lack thereof, at a food party, I usually tell people that I am a recovering food addict and that I follow a food program as part of a 12-step group. I like bringing my own food too, to feel more a “part of” as eating food together is a very social activity. I do that in most cases unless the gathering is at a time that doesn’t suit me, or the venue is in some way problematic. Most importantly I always try focus my mind on why I’m going. Is it to reminisce or focus on food or is it to talk to people and share a nice time? Saying a little prayer and asking my HP to make me an instrument, to show me how I can improve upon the gathering for other people has also proved helpful and helped me be more focused on other people instead of the food or my own problems and insecurities.
 - Slogans that may apply here are: “attraction rather than promotion”, “WDENMW”, “first things first”.
- This member shares being prepared for events by either preparing all the food to take to the event or eating before or after the event. They do not spend a lot time on the

story of what others may be thinking about the scale or the food plan. Instead, thinking this being a 12th step showing others what we do, because even though they might not need it they could know someone that does. Some suggested actions and thoughts from this GS member:

- Letting your sponsor know about the event and ask for guidance.
- Bring an abstinent beverage with you to the party. Often there is coffee, tea, or diet soda or seltzer at parties so you might not have to use your own beverage.
- When you arrive at the party, sit or stand as far away from the food as possible. Talk to people and concentrate on them instead of the food.
- What to say or do if you are offered food: say "no thank you" and if you are asked why you are not eating, say "I'm on a special diet."
- If you are pressed, you can say that you ate earlier or you will eat later
- Don't say you have food allergies because so many people have "gluten" allergies now that that answer will probably lead to someone offering you something that's gluten free! This is a hole I don't let myself go down.
- If people ask what the special diet is, I say something like: "I don't eat carbs or sugar, and I don't eat in between meals" or something like that. If someone wants to know more, you can say something like "it works for me this way," "it's just what I do" or whatever feels comfortable to you.
- Remember you do not owe anyone an explanation although we try to be polite when we respond.
- If it is a sit-down meal, you will have talked to your sponsor beforehand about whether you will bring your own food. If you do plan to bring your own food, let the host know beforehand so they are aware.
- We never rely on anyone else to provide food for us, even if they say they will. We always bring complete backup.
- Hosts do not always understand this so it can feel difficult to put our abstinence first in these situations.
- We do have a choice. We can bring our weighed and measured meal and eat there, bring unmeasured abstinent food and measure it at the party, or eat our meal before or after the party when we get home. Some other thoughts on parties that revolve around food is that food is not the reason we go. We are there to meet people, socialize and have fun and nourish our soul. And ... if we feel we are vulnerable we might skip going, our abstinence is more important than a party. One experience a member had was when coworkers invited them and a few others to a huge feast at dinner time. They took their food with them because they didn't want to be bothered to try to instruct people on how and what we eat. It didn't bother anyone but the person sitting next to this person

- –the best thing is that it didn't bother me at all and I loved every minute of that evening. The GS member shares that had they not been abstinent, they would not have had this experience, so this was a win- win for them.

CHAPTER 2 Food in Your Home

In early abstinence, some of us face the dilemma of living in a household where non-abstinent food is present. Whether it is a spouse, family, or roommate, it would be unrealistic to expect that the food we don't eat could be banished from our sight! However, with planning and diligence, we can make it easier to stay abstinent. This chapter includes some of the ways we can protect our abstinence with suggestions by Greysheet members around the world. All while co-existing in a household where non-abstinent food is present. The first thing to remember: "We keep our eyes on our own plate" meaning we do not focus on the foods others eat but focus on our own meals as much as possible.

Since a kitchen can be a minefield of trigger foods, there are practical steps we can take to help safeguard our abstinence. Most of us have found that it is a good idea to sit down with the others you live with to explain in the simplest of terms what it is we do not eat and why it is so.

Older children and spouses are the easiest to explain to. Little ones, on the other hand, may be a bit tougher sell! It is a good idea to get the family involved in helping Mom or Dad with their new eating lifestyle. For young children, weighing a piece of fruit, etc. on an old postage scale can be a fun way to introduce them to our GS way of life! We can remind them often that your food and theirs is different so we keep them stored separately. Perhaps the child would be allowed to stock "their" cabinets and shelves to make it fun. Chances are you will end up with a supportive family once they see you reap the benefits, both mental and physical, of the Greysheet Program.

At first, eliminating or at the very least, separating the non-abstinent food from our abstinent items may seem like a daunting task. You run the risk of riling other members of the household if their favorites are the ones to go. Encouraging the others to go out for their special treats can be a good idea. These foods may not always trigger us as we strengthen our GreySheet foundation. If that is the case, the items can be returned to the cupboard, only but ONLY if these foods don't set up thoughts of eating them for us. Now it is time to actually set up a GreySheet kitchen. It can be made less of a chore and more as a fun project perhaps with the help of another more experienced GreySheeter who can give support and suggestions to make this task easier. It is very important to be thorough in separating GreySheet foods from the foods we don't eat. Most of us have found that when we examine canned goods for example, so much of what is on our shelves is just plain bad for people in general. Tossing out items that haven't been used in a long time can be a blessing. Now we can see exactly what's in that cupboard! Then there are the items deemed "too good" to toss and may be tempting to have around. Arranging to give to these items to the local food pantry or a neighbor, etc. is a very good idea. Some us have foods that are absolutely banned from the house because they trigger food thoughts. After a long period of "back to back" GreySheet abstinence, it might not have

such a strong pull but why test it? Back-to-back GreySheet abstinence means the number of consecutive days that you have weighed and measured your meals and followed the GreySheet food plan. Many a compulsive eater has often kept "special items" on hand for guests only to find ourselves breaking our GreySheet abstinence by devouring these items. We can grit our teeth and toss those items ASAP because these foods we do not eat! We think of these foods as rat poison. We'd throw food out if it had rat poison in it! For us, it is exactly the same thing.

Creating a Greysheet friendly kitchen: Having one's own cabinet or at the very least, shelves for GS was imperative and probably the best way for us to start. Having a cabinet full of spices, nonperishable gs foods, scales, etc. is very helpful by making it easier for us to grab what we need from one place. When opening that cabinet door and seeing an arsenal of GreySheet abstinent foods, we can just smile with satisfaction because there in the cabinet is "back up for the back-up". Back-up is a term we use in Greysheet.

It is the stockpile of abstinent food we try to always keep on hand. For perishable foods, a second refrigerator is a luxury indeed. However, designated shelves in the communal fridge is just as good. The goal is to keep the non-abstinent food out of eye level as much as possible.

Over time, some of us have found that family members whose meals have GreySheet abstinent foods incorporated into them enjoy these foods too. This can make meal planning and preparation go a lot quicker. If possible, our spouses might help with the cooking of non-abstinent foods during the first months or so until we can safely do it. However, some members still prefer to prepare and serve others first and then finish preparing their own meal. It is not always easy to juggle serving family meals and finish cooking an abstinent meal at the same time but trial and error will help us become more efficient at it, but we must remind ourselves to K.I.S.S. (Keep it simple, sweetie!

But what about shopping and cooking for "civilians"? (people who do not follow GreySheet) Most of have found that shopping is best done with a measure of detachment. Food that is not ours should never be romanticized. Think of those things we do not eat as poison. Buying items for a list of meals you intend to serve can be a very good idea when shopping for non-abstinent foods. As a beginning GreySheet member it would be prudent to avoid preparing those meals if at all possible. If not, again employ detachment as a safeguard against the "first bite", a phrase used to describe the nosedive back into the food.

Some of us use physical means to be reminded not to taste food that is not ours. Wearing an apron when preparing a gs meal and switching to another when preparing other meals can help reinforce a change in mindset about the foods you are handling. Some of us choose to wear surgical gloves when handling foods we do not eat. This is a definite reminder not to lick fingers or spoons, etc.

Repeating this is not my food over and again like a mantra may help if you have a white-knuckle situation, which means grasping on to our abstinence so tightly because something may affect our abstinence. Or better yet, pick up that phone and call our sponsors and/or another gs member for support. Always remember "there's always another meal coming!"

CHAPTER 3 How do I explain to people why I'm not eating as I used to?

Sooner rather than later anyone who is abstinent off the Greysheet will get the question, "what are you eating?" "why are you eating this way?" When we are new to the program these kinds of questions can throw us off and we are not sure how to answer them. The reason behind our coming into Greysheet can also be very personal and we might not be ready to share this part of ourselves with others, particularly colleagues or strangers. Nevertheless, people will ask and the first people to notice the change will be the ones closest to us. Do remember that you owe no one an explanation and can simply ask that your preferences around your food be respected.

A good rule of thumb is to only talk about our solution and change in eating habits when people ask. Telling people that we have acknowledged that we have an eating disorder and can no longer eat certain foods is a good way to address some of these questions. We can also add that we are allergic to certain foods and that eating them is dangerous for us. Even if we don't break out in hives or have our breathing restricted, we do consider what happens to us when we eat these types of food to be an abnormal physical reaction and therefore it fits within the scope of an allergy. Keep in mind that an eating disorder is a medical disorder, our food plan was written by a doctor and therefore we are following a doctor's plan.

For many jokingly explaining that their "on/off button" is broken and that the scale helps them know when enough is enough, often goes a long way. This gives "normies" (non-abstinent folk) a visual aid that they can understand even if they don't understand the disease of compulsive eating. As we go along, we get better at reading the room and see what answers would explain this best for each person asking it. Most people won't truly get it and that's ok too. We are the only ones that need to know that we are compulsive eaters and understand what that truly means.

The best approach is to be honest and sincere. Some members are very open when asked about their new eating habits and say that they have found a solution to their compulsive eating in a 12-step program, explain that they have an extreme problem that needs an extreme solution. For healthy people this solution is certainly extreme, just like you wouldn't put anyone who didn't have cancer in to chemotherapy, but for us it works. This point often helps silence people who feel the need to share their opinion about our way of life.

When we are asked about our changed eating habits, we should always be mindful that this could be a chance to carry the message of the GS solution to another compulsive eater. We never know who's struggling with food or even if the person asking will later tell a friend or relative who is a compulsive eater. Our primary purpose is to stay abstinent and to carry the message to other food addicts. For this reason, we should try not to show arrogance or annoyance when or if we give an answer. We are the advocates of this program, the attraction, rather than the promotion, is what we do and how we carry ourselves.

One member told us they gave this answer whenever asked "I am a food addict and this is the solution that has worked for me for XX year." This way they let people know that there is a solution if they are interested. If you feel like sharing even more, you can tell people about your

recovery and point them to the GS web page or tell them about our meeting schedule. You may even give out your phone number if you are up for it.

The truth is our best friend when it comes to answering these questions. Unwillingness to talk about something can often lead to even more prying or misguided advice and weight loss stories. To the people closest to you it will hopefully be easiest explaining how you felt these past years and why you decided to seek the help of a 12-step program. They have probably been worried about you for longer than you know. To strangers the answer „I do this as part of a 12-step program that deals with food addiction” is also a good answer.

You friends and family might be very skeptical at first, perhaps thinking this is yet another one of your many diets, you may even view it that way too in the beginning. One member described this predicament and told us that when they started losing weight it became a little easier for her friends and family to accept the program as a solution. Then it became easier to tell people that they couldn't eat as they used to because they were addicted to sugar and grains. Today, after reaching goal weight they tell people that if they return to the food the weight will return too.

If your family is extremely curious about this change you should tell them and explain to them as much as you're comfortable with regarding your eating disorder and the program of recovery. Start with the minimum information and then add to it if they keep asking questions. Again, you do not owe anyone a detailed explanation so make sure you are comfortable answering. The people closest to you will get a better understanding the more they see you weigh, measure and commit your food.

Here are a few other variations on how to answer these questions:

- “I am trying to change my life to the better and sugar and grains make me want to eat all the time.”
- “I have an addiction and certain types of food make me crave more of the same.”
- “I am unable to eat certain types of food without abusing them and being abstinent gives me a freedom from obsession over food.”
- “I’m following a food program that works for me.”

If people are very curious and keep asking question one solution is to ask them to hold off on their questions until you've finished eating. Either they will ask again or they won't but while you are enjoying your food it's good to not have to answer a litany of question. Another good tip is to give people the address to the GS website and tell them they can call you if they have any questions or want to know more.

CHAPTER 4 Living Abstinent---Insomnia and Eating Dreams

When we were binging and high on sugar, most of us had no idea if and when we were tired. Ingesting enormous amounts of sugar and carbohydrates causes highs and instant energy

followed by nervous energy and usually followed by a crash. This is all chemically induced. Our bodies have very little say in the matter.

When we abstain from sugar, grains and carbs, we are depriving our bodies of chemical that have dictated, often for years, when to be awake and when to crash. Nervous energy becomes anxiety which is accompanied by withdrawal symptoms. Many of us are in huge discomfort from one week to as much as six months. Once the physical discomfort passes, our minds can disrupt our sleep for a long time.

We can feel exhausted but be unable to sleep. Once we do start sleeping, it can seem like we can't get enough sleep. We can swing from one extreme to the opposite. Unless you are in profound _____, we recommend that you do not go to a Doctor for sleep medication.

You would only be substituting one chemical for another. As one GS member says, "the only way out is through."

If you are experiencing insomnia, members suggest keeping "easy reading" books by your bed. No matter where in the world you are, there is probably a phone meeting happening. Have your sponsor give you the number and access code. Another member says she keeps program literature by her bed and reads that when she can't sleep.

It's also a good idea to check other health habits. Are we drinking too much caffeine? Are we getting enough exercise? Doctors are our friends. It's wise to get a physical exam. Just be sure to tell your physician that you are an addict and cannot ingest sugar and grains in either liquid or hard form. This information helps your doctor know how to help you.

Being tired is a vulnerable and dangerous place for a Compulsive Eater. The disease can get its foot in the door when our guard is down. Members advise surrounding yourself with other GreySheeters, going to as many face-to-face, phone and video meetings as possible and making phone calls anytime of the day or night if you think you might eat.

One member shares that when she has insomnia, she memorizes program slogans and repeats them to herself over and over; she will often listen to audiobooks, meditations or soft music on her device.

Another member wrote us "Of course, the middle of the night was prime time for eating compulsively when everyone else was in bed. Simply: stay in bed or at least stay in the room you are sleeping in. It's a good idea to have plenty of phone numbers of Greysheeters who might still be awake due to time difference and not mind at all receiving a call. Lie quietly and pray. "I won't die while waiting for my next meal" or "There is always another meal coming" are good things to remember. Fill a thermos with hot water in it for tea and keep that in the room with you"

After we have been abstinent awhile, we find that for the most part our natural sleep rhythms set in. Then the challenge is not to get too busy or take on too much. Finding balance and learning how much sleep you need every night will come to every one of us.

What about eating dreams? Sooner or later, all of us have an eating dream—or nightmare some say!! Many of us believe that eating dreams are gifts from our Higher Power. We are reminded of the hell we left behind without actually having had to break our abstinence. Waking up is a huge relief and we get to practice gratitude!

Some of us immediately call our sponsor. She or he may suggest that we inventory our program. Do I have a home group? Am I attending enough meetings? Am I making enough phone calls? Am I reading my program literature? Am I following the directions of my sponsor regarding step work? Am I taking time in the morning and evening to connect with my Higher Power? Am I doing service? Am I sharing my story? Eating dreams can be a gentle nudge to up our program.

One member wrote us to say that as time goes by, she has fewer eating dreams. Other members agree and add that these dreams/nightmares are much more likely to happen in withdrawal. We hear over and over again in meetings that eating dreams are an opportunity to practice gratitude. Write down your own gratitude list then reach out to someone who may be struggling.