

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous

A Quick Reference For Newcomers: 12 Questions Frequently Asked About ABA Copyright © 2009 by Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous

1. What is ABA?

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous is a 12-Step Fellowship and Program of recovery for people with eating disorders. It was founded in 1993 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Following the publication in 2002 of its textbook of recovery (*Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous: The Fellowship Details Its Program of Recovery For Anorexia and Bulimia*), ABA groups began meeting all over the world. At ABA, we support one another to recover from eating disorders. Each member shares out of her or his personal experience, strength, and hope.

2. Who is welcome at ABA?

ABA welcomes anyone with a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices. This includes women and men suffering from any variant of disordered eating and exercise patterns: restrictive eating practices (anorexia), bingeing and purging (bulimia), compulsive exercise, compulsive eating, binge-eating, and similar disorders.

3. Are there membership fees at ABA?

Like all 12-Step Fellowships, there are no dues or fees for ABA membership. We are self-supporting through our own voluntary contributions. We are free to contribute or not when a basket is passed at the end of a meeting. All money collected is used to pay rent for the meeting room, buy supplies for the group, purchase literature for distribution to newcomers, etc. There are no trained professionals at ABA, and no one is paid to attend ABA meetings.

4. Is ABA connected with other “food fellowships”?

ABA is completely autonomous and is not allied or affiliated with any other 12-Step Fellowship or outside organization, even those dealing with eating disorders. ABA does not consider itself a “food fellowship,” since our problem is not food in itself, but rather the particular eating, purging, and exercise practices that allow us to *feel in control* of food or body weight or body shape.

5. How does ABA differ from “food fellowships” such as Overeaters Anonymous, Food Addicts Anonymous, and Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous?

The principal difference between ABA and most other Fellowships is twofold: First, the unique wording of our First Step: “We admitted we were powerless over our insane eating practices—that our lives had become unmanageable.” The “food fellowships” generally state that they are “powerless over food.” We in ABA are not powerless over food.

Secondly, our unique definition of the “drug” to which we are addicted: not food, but rather *the feeling of being in control of our food or weight or body shape*; and the concept of “sobriety” that naturally follows this definition. (ABA textbook, pp 58-65.)

6. What does “sobriety” mean in ABA?

To be sober means to give up the drug to which we are addicted. In ABA, since we are addicted to the feeling of being in control of our food or weight or body shape, to be sober we need to *surrender all control* of our food and exercise and body weight and body shape to a Higher Power. Sobriety is not eating in a particular way, but rather surrendering to the way our Higher Power wills us to eat and to the body weight and shape our Higher Power wills us to have. In ABA we have learned that we cannot use willpower to get sober or stay sober; we can only receive sobriety as a daily gift from our Higher Power.

7. What is “meal-support” in ABA?

We who suffer from eating disorders are mentally ill people, obsessed with increasingly bizarre ideas about what we can and cannot eat, and about our body size and shape. Because of the power of this obsession, in early recovery we cannot surrender control of our food to a Higher Power unless someone else plans, prepares, and serves our meals and snacks for us. This is the concept of “meal-support.” (See “Getting Sober” in the ABA textbook, pp 66-80.) The person providing this meal-support is directed by knowledgeable outside professionals (physician, dietitian, etc) who know our particular nutritional needs. We trust that our Higher Power is working through this person to provide what we need to eat in order to arrive at a natural weight for our body—“the weight we were created to be” (ABA textbook, p 67) before we acquired our eating disorder. When we surrender and receive food in this way, and refrain from getting rid of the food through purging or exercise, we are sober.

8. How long is meal-support needed?

We need to continue receiving full meal-support until we are “restored to sanity” in our thinking about our body and about food. This process is gradual and occurs as we move through the 12 Steps of recovery outlined in our textbook, with a sponsor guiding us. Once we are no longer afraid of getting fat—and therefore unafraid of eating in a normal fashion—we can begin selecting our own meals and snacks while still remaining in a state of surrender to our Higher Power’s will regarding our food and our weight. (ABA textbook, pp 68-70.)

9. What is the purpose of ABA’s 12 Steps?

Once we are sober, we plunge into a deep well of pain originating from the psychological and spiritual elements of our disease. (See “The Iceberg Theory” in the ABA textbook, pp 45-57.) These elements are simply distorted thinking processes learned early in life. Our pathological eating, purging, and exercise practices served as a cover-up or escape route from the pain generated by this disordered thinking. Unless this thinking changes, we will almost certainly relapse into our addictive behaviors once more, or into an alternative addiction. Before getting sober, many of us had tried unsuccessfully to change our thinking, using a variety of methods (ABA textbook, p 59). In ABA we have come to believe that only a Higher Power can change these thinking patterns. ABA’s 12 Steps, adapted from the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, are a deeply effective spiritual pathway that connects us with this Higher Power of our own understanding. As we stay sober and take the Steps, guided by an experienced sponsor, our Higher Power transforms the way we think about food, about our bodies, about ourselves and others, and about life in general. Once this psychic change has occurred, the risk of relapsing into our old eating and exercise practices virtually disappears.

10. What is a sponsor and how do I find one?

Working the 12-Step Program is like traveling through uncharted territory. A sponsor is a fellow ABA member who serves as a guide or mentor to assist us in taking the 12 Steps. If we are not yet sober, a sponsor will first support us in getting sober, since doing the 12 Steps is ineffective until we are sober. We acquire a sponsor simply by asking a fellow member, usually someone of the sex as ourselves, to sponsor us. This person needs to be sober, have a sponsor themselves, and be actively engaged in doing the 12-Step Program. If the first person we approach is unavailable, we ask someone else, until we finally find a person who is available. (ABA textbook, pp 157-161.)

11. Can I use a sponsor from a different 12-Step Fellowship?

Many of us are in recovery from other addictions—particularly alcoholism or drug addiction—when we begin to address our eating disorder, so we already have an AA or NA sponsor. After joining ABA, ideally we will find an ABA sponsor also. However, qualified ABA sponsors may be in short supply, since ABA is a relatively new Fellowship. If we cannot find an ABA sponsor, we could ask our AA or NA sponsor to guide us through the ABA Steps, *provided that we are sober and that we first find a sober and experienced ABA member to take us through Step One*. ABA's First Step would be incomprehensible to anyone outside of ABA, whereas the remaining eleven Steps are common to all 12-Step Fellowships.

12. Are eating-disorder professionals involved with ABA?

As with all 12-Step Fellowships, there are no professionals at ABA. Nevertheless, we are well aware of the devastating physical consequences of eating disorders and the risk of death. We encourage all our members to consult knowledgeable health-care professionals and accept any indicated medical treatment alongside their participation in ABA. Furthermore, in order to get sober most of us need to be assessed by a qualified dietitian who can give appropriate directions to the person providing our meal-support. The dietitian usually will continue to monitor our condition and make any necessary changes in our dietary prescription as time goes by.

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