

Allison R – My Disease has Two Faces

I have a disease with two faces – bingeing and restricting. When I came to OA, I thought if I could just stop the self-destructive binges I'd be fine. I never wanted to give up the unending quest for thinness and perfection. In my addicted way of thinking, restricting - along with the associated compulsive exercising - was “normal.” Recovery has meant giving up all of it.

I always felt like I didn't fit in. I began craving approval and felt I was an awful person unless someone complimented me. I tried to get a sense of goodness from high grades, pleasing others, and – most importantly – from being thin.

My obsession with weight and dieting gained strength as I grew older. In a month or maybe a few weeks, I would gain about 20 pounds from emotionally triggered binges. Then I would get so disgusted with myself that I would reverse it. I ate little, exercised a lot, and would lose the same 20 pounds in an equally short time. I was sick inside, but appeared healthy on the outside.

I wanted to stop but couldn't. It took a long time for me to admit I had a problem and could not solve it on my own. I found OA and a sponsor. I worked the steps but couldn't stay abstinent. After a few days of abstinence, I thought I was cured, which threw me back into bingeing.

My disease progressed and although I wasn't over- or underweight, I lived in hell. I justified using laxatives. The obsession with food made me unable to deal with my career or life. Behind my smile I was filled with fear, grandiosity and anguish. I kept coming to OA meetings, but couldn't “get it.”

I left a successful career because of emotional pain and the sense that I would never recover from my eating disorder if I stayed. I now believe my Higher Power was guiding me to better things. After more uncontrollable binges and laxative use, I came to a HOW format meeting.

I finally admitted I was broken where food was concerned. My ways of dealing with it weren't working. They only got me further into the disease. So I tried HOW and one day at a time, it's still working to keep me abstinent over four years later.

It's a paradox: the structure of the HOW format brings me freedom. I have a food plan that isn't determined by my thoughts or feelings, which used to justify all sorts of self-destructive eating behaviors. Working the steps, being accountable, and developing relationships with my Higher Power and OA friends keeps me abstinent.

The craving for perfection fueled my disease. When I'm spiritually centered, show love and gratitude, put abstinence first and connect with OA friends, I accept that I don't need to be perfect. I experience a sense of peace, no matter what life brings, no matter what mistakes I make, knowing that it'll all be okay.