

Compulsive Eaters Anonymous (CEA)-HOW: Steps One, Two, and Three

As a Compulsive Eaters Anonymous (CEA)-HOW sponsor, you play a vital role in helping your sponsees lay a solid foundation for their recovery, starting with Steps One, Two and Three. Along with taking sponsees through these Steps during the first 30-day questions, here is an overview with additional insight you can use to enhance your sponsees' experience.

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over food and that our lives had become unmanageable.

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous poses this question in Step One: "Who cares to admit complete defeat?" Compulsive eaters certainly don't. Yet humility is crucial to recovery from compulsive eating.

Just as an alcoholic cannot take even one drink without the risk of going on a bender, a compulsive eater cannot eat addictive food, such as sugar or flour, without the risk of bingeing—no matter how much willpower he or she possesses in other areas. When consuming addictive food, a compulsive eater falls prey to a merciless obsession for more. This leads to an unmanageable life.

Step One calls for us to admit our powerlessness over food—this is the first step in recovery. As it says in *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*, "The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed." It takes a lot of courage for us compulsive eaters to be honest with ourselves but we must if we are to recover: Honesty is the "H" of the HOW program.

Fortunately we don't have to take this step alone. We can speak freely about our devastating weakness and all its consequences in CEA-HOW meetings without fear of rejection or embarrassment. When we share honestly about our eating histories, we open ourselves up to the love, camaraderie, and acceptance from people who are just like us.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

On the outside, most compulsive eaters look like everybody else. What the outside world doesn't see, however, is the mental obsession compulsive eaters experience. We are obsessed with food and we can't remove this obsession from

ourselves no matter how much we might want to or try. When it comes to food, we are insane.

When it comes to food, not only are we insane, but we also can't heal our own insane minds with our own insane minds—a Power greater than ourselves must restore us to sanity. That's where Step Two comes in—once we truly realize we are powerless over not only our eating but also our insanity, we will come to believe we must accept spiritual help.

To paraphrase *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, defiance is an outstanding characteristic of compulsive eaters. So, the question is, just how are defiant compulsive eaters supposed to take Step Two, especially those of us who are atheistic or agnostic? Luckily, CEA-HOW doesn't demand acceptance of a specific God or even any God at all. CEA-HOW is a spiritual program, not a religious one. We can choose whatever conception of a Higher Power we want—as long as it isn't us.

Once we stop fighting a dependence on a Higher Power and start practicing the CEA-HOW program to the best of our ability, we will begin to experience the miracle of recovery from the food obsession. We just need faith and an open mind—an open mind is the “O” of the HOW program.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

When we CEA-HOW members relate our experiences with trying to control our eating before coming to CEA-HOW, we usually state that no amount of willpower could make us adhere to a sensible program of eating for any length of time. We may have had willpower in other areas, but when it came to our eating, it was no good whatever.

But our willpower will be very effective when it comes to working Step Three. Instead of using our willpower in futile attempts to control and enjoy our eating, we're asked to use it to do our Higher Power's will for us. We're faced with making a decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of our Higher Power. Taking Step Three proves to be a turning point in our recovery. It is the “W” in HOW—*willingness*.

The rewards are great. *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* describes Step Three as the opening of a door that appears to be locked. Our willingness to take action is the key that unlocks the door. Walking through the door ends our old lives and begins new ones.

In Closing

No compulsive eater wants to admit he or she is powerless over food or that his or her life is unmanageable. And he or she certainly doesn't want to turn his or her life over to the care of a Higher Power. But when he or she does, the miracle of recovery happens.

Be sure to relate your own experience with working the first three steps with your sponsees. And most importantly, let them know that recovery from food addiction is indeed possible and it all begins with Steps One, Two and Three.