

The Food Addiction Institute, FAI founded in 2005, is an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to support the recovery of all food addicts. Our mission is to advocate widespread acceptance of food addiction as a disease of substance abuse and the availability of effective, abstinence-based solutions. To accomplish our mission FAI works towards the following:

- ❖ Supply resources for those who may be food addicted.
- ❖ Provide public and professional education about food addiction as a treatable chemical dependency. Audiences include the general public, physicians, dietitians, therapists, counselors and allied health professionals, nationally and internationally.
- ❖ Help identify and expand knowledge about food addiction.
- ❖ Create a forum for the development and dissemination of innovative and effective public health strategies related to the prevention, mitigation and treatment of food addiction.
- ❖ Offer information about promising new practices for the treatment of food addiction.



One Meal Closer to Freedom

A starter booklet

www.foodaddictioninstitute.org



People addicted to food need extensive support to stay in remission and/or recover from this condition. This starter booklet will help you begin your journey.

THIS STARTER BOOKLET DOES NOT PROVIDE MEDICAL ADVICE. The information contained in this booklet is not intended to be a substitute for, or to be relied upon as, medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This booklet is for informational purposes only. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.

Food addiction is like drug and alcohol addiction. Addiction means the body has become chemically dependent on one or more substances and craves these substances to function “normally.” So, when we are talking about a specific food as potentially being a substance of abuse, we are saying the body has become dependent on a particular food or eating behavior.

- ✓ The most common addictive foods are foods high in sugar, flour, fat, grains and salt or some combination of these, “highly palatable” foods.
- ✓ The most common addictive eating behaviors are bingeing, purging and volume eating.



Food Addiction is a chronic and progressive disease characterized by seeking the foods or food behaviors to which we are addicted, eating them, and repeating this compulsively.

A person will have a great deal of difficulty controlling these urges despite harmful consequences. This is the nature of addiction. It will often take more quantity to get the same results or increased frequency.

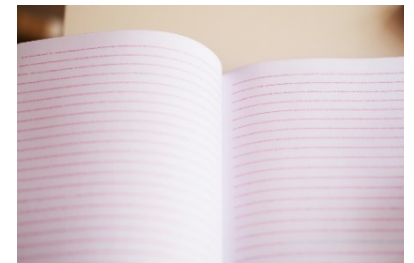
The information in this booklet shares what has helped other food addicts. The following is a list of big and small things to address as you begin working seriously to achieve your recovery from food addiction. **By reading this pamphlet, you have already started your journey. It's important to remember to keep moving forward no matter how hard this is, how many setbacks you may experience, or conversely, how deceptively easy it may seem at times.**

1. Understand and accept these concepts:

- ❖ Food addiction is a brain disease. Physical cravings and a mental obsession begins when you ingest certain foods over and over and/or repeat certain addictive behaviors.
- ❖ You are not at fault. You did not give yourself this condition. You may have inherited susceptibility through DNA or become vulnerable to it as a result of things in your living environment (foods or experiences) that you were exposed to over time.
- ❖ The behaviors associated with your eating are a result of you having the disease of food addiction. You are you. You are not your addiction.
- ❖ You will always have a food addiction. You can arrest your food addiction, on a daily basis, by adopting a new way of eating and behaving with food coupled with a new way of thinking.
- ❖ You cannot deal with your food addiction alone. You need and deserve several kinds of support.

2. **Be honest:** Exposing the truth to yourself is key. Having a food addiction is isolating. To break out of your isolation you need to expose and share it with other safe and understanding people in your life. Joining a peer support community with other food addicts is the best way to do this.

3. **Keep a food diary:** Begin writing down what you eat every day. Write it all down, even if you are over eating and bingeing; what you eat and drink. Take a look at it after a week or a month and begin to note patterns, emotions, or situations



that you had before or after you ate. If you are female, take note of your monthly cycle. Food addicts can eat no matter what is happening or what they are feeling: good or bad.

- 4. Identify the foods triggering your addiction:** The following are common triggers: any type of highly palatable foods that have been engineered to have a tasty combination of sugar, fat, and carbohydrate (like chips and fast foods, etc.), processed foods or drinks (breads, cookies, crackers, sodas, and coffee concoctions, etc.), and sugar (pastries, candy, salad dressing, or anything that has sugar among the first 4 ingredients, etc.).

Other triggers:

- Grains (any or all types)
- Hand to mouth foods like nuts and seeds
- High protein or high fat
- Sugar free products (like gum and diet soda)
- Anything you can't stop eating.



To do: Using the trial and error approach, begin removing from your diet all food substances triggering your addiction. Doing so one at a time can help you be certain of what precisely is triggering you.

- 5. Identify the behaviors triggering your addiction:** The following are common behaviors triggering food addiction: Bingeing, purging, and eating high volume of any food.

Other behavioral triggers: eating with hands, licking the plate or bowl/fingers, weighing yourself constantly, going by a mirror and always looking at your body and critiquing your weight loss or gain, not eating, eating frequently within a small window of time (1-3 hours), undereating, skimming the internet compulsively looking for the next diet or another way of eating (jumping from one food

addiction program to another like a ball in a pinball machine, being part of multiple social media groups, joining and leaving them, or trying a keto group one day and switching to a vegan group the next).

To do: Begin noticing the behaviors that are part of your addiction. These behaviors fuel your mental obsession. Begin removing these behaviors.

6. Identify other possible triggers:

- A. HALT stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired. Become aware of HALT throughout your day and learn how to manage or prevent it.
- B. Codependency, in the simplest of terms, is looking towards others for approval over the needs of yourself. Many food addicts have codependency tendencies. One of the ways codependency manifests when you are in recovery from food addiction is by not asking for what you need when it comes to your food. For example, if you are not eating sugar or bread because it's a trigger for you, it's important to ask for what you need when you go to someone's house or out to eat. Work on feeling confident about telling others what you need when it comes to your food without worrying about hurting their feelings.
- C. Trauma from Adverse Childhood Experiences, ACE or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD are common occurrences in children and adults. Experiencing trauma through an intensely traumatic, scary, or dangerous event as a child or as an adult can trigger food addiction. Be aware of how trauma affects your life and explore these topics for further support.

7. **Clean out the kitchen:** After identifying your trigger foods it's time to remove the items from your kitchen. In the beginning, it's important to avoid being around your trigger foods. If you live with others, have a conversation with them about what you are doing and what you need. For whatever reason, if it is not possible to remove trigger foods from your kitchen, create a separate place for them or take them out of your line of sight. It's vital that to the greatest extent possible you eliminate your major trigger foods from your living and work environments.

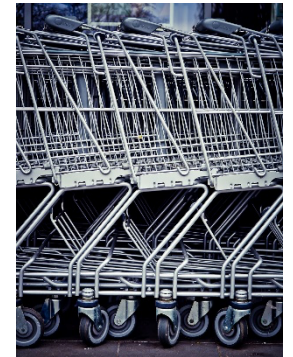


8. **What and how to eat:** After removing the trigger foods and behaviors, make a commitment to eating 3 meals a day or 5 smaller meals per day. Write down what you will eat the day before and stick to your plan. Be specific with the amounts of foods you write down. Buy a scale and measuring utensils and weigh and measure your food. Share what you intend to eat the next day with someone else (a friend, mentor, sponsor, or online group, etc.).

Work with a dietician who understands food addiction or join a peer support group and use the food plan.

Special note: Only you will know which foods trigger your addiction and which behaviors you need to watch out for. You are the only one that can determine that, and everyone is different. This means that “it” may be on the food plan but you still cannot eat “it” because it triggers you.

9. **Grocery shopping:** Stay on the outside perimeter of the grocery store. Try not to look or go down all the center aisles that are filled with trigger foods. **Note:** The grocery store is a volatile place for food addicts. If you can't go grocery shopping because it's too triggering, you can now order food from grocery stores and just drive by and pick it up outside or have it delivered.



10. **Withdrawal:** This will be different for each person depending how long you have been dealing with your addiction. Initial withdrawal can last from 3 to 5 to 8 days. However, sometimes it can take months for the physical or mental craving for certain substances or behaviors to disappear completely.

- ❖ Drink lots of water, sleep, exercise and break a sweat daily, go for walks, try to avoid triggering events or places.
- ❖ You may need to go further to create an intensive care unit type environment in your life in which you sleep, wear your bedroom slippers, don't go out, and even take sick days off work.
- ❖ Detox from addictive substance in food is a real thing. Depending on how addicted you are, you may need to stay home for a few days and clear your calendar so all you do is rest, sleep, and eat your non-addictive foods.

11. **Slips:** This means you pick up a trigger food and put it in your mouth. You can easily make a mistake and not know sugar is in something or accidentally put something on your plate that is on the list of foods you can't eat. However, a conscious slip is when you decide to eat something you know is triggering. It's important to know the difference: “I put something in my body that is not ok,” or

“I did not know” (a mistake) vs. a slip: a conscious choice to eat a trigger food.

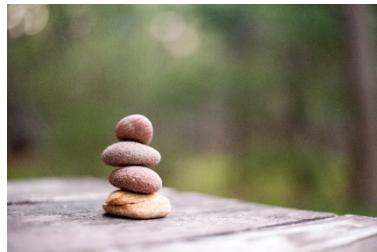
You can also have a hijacking experience when you do not realize you are picking up the addictive foods and putting them in your mouth until after you have done it. Your brain can be so inflamed by the addiction that there is no space between your thought of eating and the act of eating. The compulsion to eat may be that powerful.

To do: Begin to recognize if you have slips and be honest with yourself about what it is: conscious choice or otherwise?

12. Phone: Picking up the phone and calling before you eat will distract you and will also give you an opportunity to connect with others. It would be great if you found a few other food addicts with whom to do that. The addiction is strong and in the beginning the phone can be a great way to stay away from active addiction.

13. Writing: Buy a new journal and begin writing about your experience. When you stop engaging in your addiction, many feelings and emotions come up. Writing can help alleviate how you feel and help to clear your mind.

14. Meditation: Begin utilizing a meditation protocol to support you in this process. There are a variety of resources available on how to start and what to do. To begin, set a time, preferably in the morning, to start your daily meditation practice. It can be as little as five minutes a day to start. Sit quietly with your arms folded on your lap and with your legs



touching the ground. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Find a phrase that you can repeat to your self that brings you calmness. Notice negative thoughts, observe them, and focus on letting those thoughts go. You can read something spiritual, meditate on what you read, and you can also use this time to write.

The goal is to begin consistently setting aside time for quiet reflection. You are changing your life and recovering from an addiction so setting aside this time will support that process. Try to build up your morning meditation to 30 minutes a day. As you explore how to meditate, be willing to try some of the suggestions you come across.

15. Trial and error: If you are just starting on your journey try a trial and error approach. The most important thing is to avoid shame or judging yourself. You are learning about what works and what does not. It's important to accept what you are learning.

16. Visit and possibly join a peer support group. With the help of the group or extensive one-on-one work with an individual who has been successful, you may be able to get a more in-depth assessment even as you learn more about the sorts of things you are trying to do from a trial and error perspective.



17. Going to restaurants: It's important to ask for what you need at a restaurant. If the waitstaff is knowledgeable then they can assist in identifying foods to serve your needs from the menu. If you are sugar free, grain free, or some other combination, it helps to call ahead after looking at the menu online to ask for the assistance of the chef.

Here are some more tips:

- ❖ You can begin your order by saying “I eat no grain or sugar” or by saying what you don’t eat. You can say you have severe allergies or “I am following a medical food plan. Restaurants are used to getting special orders from their patrons.
- ❖ Order what you would like to eat WITHOUT any bread, breading, cornstarch, flour, or sauce. Many restaurants now have a gluten free menu. Does it meet your needs?
- ❖ Saying “Will that work?” engages the waitstaff in the process. When the food comes, if it has breading or sauce on it, a reminder of what you ordered is usually sufficient for the waitstaff to return the item to the kitchen and to return with what you did order.
- ❖ Order a salad without croutons and with oil and vinegar dressing on the side. Ordering your protein plain on its own separate plate often works.
- ❖ Go to restaurants with a salad bar from which to choose your own selections. Some restaurants will even sauté in garlic and oil your chosen vegies from the salad bar for you to have cooked vegetables. If it is not at a busy time for the kitchen, ask.
- ❖ Remember the restaurant wants return business. Knowing what we want creates potential future meals for them to serve.
- ❖ Sending thanks to the Chef and tipping well those who assist you also have favorable outcomes too.



Staying on track

What you are seeking is the kind of mindful attention to your eating which allows you some freedom from your addiction. The act of



weighing and measuring, writing your food down, the structure of your eating (what and when), the agreements you are making, and the truth you are accepting are positive steps started on this journey.

Here are some more tips:

- Write down your goals and stick to them one meal at a time and one day at a time.
- It's easy to make exceptions; however, to do so usually gets you back into the cycle of active addiction.
- After the withdrawals, complete abstinence from trigger foods is easier than moderation. Once you get abstinent from your trigger foods it's important to never pick them back up again, one day at a time.
- If you have eliminated your trigger foods and you still can't stop eating, look at what may be causing this. You may have hidden sugars you are still ingesting. Make sure to read labels carefully. You may still be eating trigger foods.
- The most common additional abstinence suggested is from grain products (flour, whole grains, and any items made from flour or whole grains.) These are sugar's “cousins.”
- You may also need additional support.

Getting Support

This is a lifelong endeavor. You may need refinements of your food plan over time due to aging, hormone changes, or medical conditions. The task of figuring out what foods are your personal triggers and how to go about abstaining from them can be a tough one. Many people have found help of some kind, rather than trying to do it on their own, can be very helpful.

Large categories of support are:

- ❖ Peer support groups, particularly food oriented 12 step groups, and food addiction groups organized by providers but peer lead.
- ❖ You can also start a vibrant peer support community that will support you and others in your own community. There are many food addicts in your local community and some may be friends, coworkers, or family members. Begin talking to them about food addiction and share the FAI resources with them.
- ❖ Professional support of some kind. This may be provided by a physician, a nurse, a nutritionist, a food addiction counselor or coach, a recovery coach, an ongoing treatment program, a treatment facility or some other kind of health coach.

Sometimes we may need to enlist the support of a combination of these categories.



The goal in food addiction recovery is for people who have been struggling, to be free from food cravings and to create a state of mind and body free from obsession with food. This is not a process of deprivation.

Creating a meaningful and purpose driven life and learning to use physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual practices to remain free from trigger and binge foods and behaviors can lead to relief, renewal, and freedom.

Daily positive actions can sustain and enhance recovery. We hope these suggestions prove useful to you. We wish you the very best in your search for recovery.

For more information on food addiction and to get involved with FAI visit: <https://foodaddictioninstitute.org/>