

Food Addiction: Progression and Recommended Actions

Disease Stage	Recommended Actions
Pre-Disease	Prevention
No sign of abnormal eating or reactions to specific foods. If no dependency or pathology develops, this stage will continue through the person's entire life.	Education about food addiction. Ongoing checks for signs of chemical dependency. Moderation in eating, especially commonly addictive foods, e.g., sugar, caffeine, excess fat, alcohol, drugs.
Early Stage	Detox and Abstinence
Problems with weight management, cycles of weight gain followed by dieting, weight loss, and weight gain again. (Occasional binge eating on sugar, excess fat, or volume could be early-stage food addiction or a normal eater making unhealthy choices.)	Identify addictive foods. Eliminate binge and trigger foods. Move through detoxification. This often seems extreme if negative consequences are not yet severe. This can be the beginning of addictive denial.
Middle Stage	Twelve Step Group/Counselor
Frequent binge eating and grazing. Purging or severe restriction may begin. Rationalizing before eating, guilt afterward. Could be advancing food addiction or emotional problem eater with a psychologically based eating disorder.	Participation in a food-related Twelve Step program, e.g., Overeaters Anonymous, and/or work with a food addictions counselor. Assistance with addressing blocks to physical abstinence, especially denial. Develop feeling skills, resolve trauma.
Late Stage	More Structure and Support
Serious consequences from overeating – morbid obesity, Type II diabetes, chronic depression and/or spiritual disillusionment, and eating anyway. Food no longer provides comfort, escape, oblivion, etc. Loss of control, increasing tolerance	Participation in a highly structured Twelve Step program, e.g., Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous, Compulsive Eaters Anonymous—HOW. Outpatient treatment and/or workshops such as those offered by ACORN. Abstinence as a spiritual path.
Final Stage	Primary Inpatient or Residential Treatment
Severe consequences – hospitalization for heart attacks, suicide attempts, lost jobs or inability to work, ruined relationships, treatment and/or intestinal surgery followed by relapse, housebound or confined to nursing homes.	Given the lack of any hospital-based inpatient treatment for food addiction, alternatives include Turning Point of Tampa, Milestones in Recovery, Shades of Hope, ACORN's year-long Living in Abstinence program. This is sometimes insufficient.
DEATH	