

## Marilyn's OA Travel Tips

Blessings to anyone looking at this. The picture below shows what I put in my "travel bag" which is a large one or two gallon freezer Ziploc food storage bag.



Included in picture starting from lower left corner: Laundry soap pods, sponge and dish soap, clothespins for closing food items and curtains to keep out light, peeler, can opener, Tupperware midgets for oil and other small items, refrigerator thermometers, sharp chopping knives, foil, upper left is plastic containers for storage that I pick up at a Whole Foods when available, produce department vegetable bags for peelings/food trash, thin paper plates for use as a cutting board, multiple sizes of plastic bags (quart, snack, classic sandwich bags {sans the sandwich};-), scale, paper towels, steamer, and strainer.

The items I bring are tailored to the “kitchen” situation I will have at my destination. For instance, I don’t need the vegetable steamer if I am staying at a hotel with just a fridge. I do bring the steamer to places that have a kitchen, though, because they often don’t have one. I have functioned very well for weeks at a time with only a mini-fridge in a hotel. It requires planning, but is doable with God’s help and a strong desire and commitment to stay abstinent and sober. Depending on the size of the fridge, I have asked for an extra one. Some hotels now only have coolers for drinks that the lowest temp is 50 degrees. Food should be stored between 34 - 40 degrees, especially proteins and dairy items. I tell them I need a real fridge for medical reasons. If I can’t get a fridge, it is not a hotel I can stay at.

- Masking Tape - This is particularly helpful for carrying food in Tupperware on planes. The cabin pressure can often make the lids pop off. Taping across the lid on the the container in a + (cross) shape helps keep the food from spilling. I make sure I empty the excess air out of the Tupperware before taping by pressing down on the lid till you hear the air escape.

- I use refrigerator thermometers in small hotel refrigerators to prevent freezing. The temperature range in those is wide, so I use two and attempt to keep the temp between 34 - 40 degrees. I had a whole fridge full of food freeze solid at the suggested temperature on the knob on one trip! Bringing the thermometers is worth the effort.

- Laundry Pods are useful in case a washer is available and necessary.

- In the last years, I have been using VRBO (Vacation Rental By Owner), HomeAway, or AirBnB over renting at hotels, whenever possible. People rent their homes or apartments for short-term stays. Usually three nights is the minimum number of nights you must purchase, but it varies. When I have a full kitchen to use, my food is exactly as I have it at home, with the exception of using oil packets (Marconi Brand), at times.

- Note on the oil packets: The Marconi brand packages of olive oil are now 3/8 ounce, rather than the .5 ounce they used to be. Because oil is the biggest problem when traveling because of the potential for spilling and ruining clothes, you and a sponsor can decide that the 3/8 oz. packet is your measured amount while you are traveling. What makes food abstinent is the fact that it is committed, weighed and or measured, and used with the knowledge of a food sponsor.

Trader Joe’s sells .5 oz. packets of coconut oil, if that is in your food plan.

.5 oz. oil = 1 TBSP

1 oz. oil = 2 TBSP

- When staying in a regular hotel room, I often get a couple plates and bowls from the hotel to use and re-use during my stay. I wash dishes in the bathroom sink and find a place to drip-dry them on hand towels somewhere in the bathroom (if it is larger) or elsewhere in the room. I ask for extra hand towels.

- Paper plates are a great cutting board and I peel vegetables and fruits on to the plate. Then I fold up the paper plate with all the scraps and put it in to one of the plastic vegetable bags (see picture) and close it up to avoid smells. I might just twist it to close it and use it again in the morning. Then I just toss it in the trash. Most hotels don’t have plastic bags in the barrels so this prevents a mess.

## FOOD SUGGESTIONS:

-I try to use foods that can stand to be unrefrigerated for six or more hours while traveling. Raw zucchini, cucumber with the seeds cut out, carrots, grape tomatoes, celery, and radishes are really hearty vegetables on the road without refrigeration. Frozen peas can be used as a vegetable that just needs to be defrosted. If you weigh frozen peas that have not been defrosted in a tupperware with any or many of the above raw vegetables everything will be defrosted, still cold/cool, and delicious 4-6 hours later. Even if the peas are already defrosted, they are fine 4-6 hours later, too. On the road, I have the option to replace a cooked vegetable with another salad/finger salad(raw veggies described above). Thus, I would have 16 oz of raw vegetables rather than eight oz. raw and eight oz. cooked. My sponsor supports these options, which makes it abstinent for me.

-Wondering what to do with oil if you eat mostly finger vegetables? You can dip veggies in it, pour it over your protein, or just drink it. All of these have worked for me.

-I try to weigh and measure as much food as I can before I leave to save time. Thus, I might weigh out nuts for a week or two in advance (nuts are not a trigger for me...I eat raw and unsalted nuts.)

-Weigh out oats for the week, if they are in your food plan. You can bring along a mini- electric kettle and small thermos. Put the oats in the thermos and pour hot water in the night before and it will be fully cooked and warm in the a.m. You can also obtain some very hot water and use that. Tap water will not be hot enough. Others put dry oatmeal into yogurt. (Google "travel electric water kettle" and check out options).

-Hard boiled eggs are easy to obtain everywhere, even more so in Europe. You can get them in packs of two in the egg section of most grocery stores. They are a little rubbery when you buy them pre-prepared and shelled in the grocery store, but definitely edible and abstinent.

-If you are not allergic to dairy and eat cheese, there are a few brands that make individually wrapped 1 oz. servings. I believe it is entirely acceptable to use these as the measurement. You can just write it on your food as "two / 1 oz. pkgs. of \_\_\_\_\_ (put in type of cheese)."

-If you eat yogurt, you can use eight ounce containers as your measurement when on the road. Write down your commitment as: "One / 8 oz. cont. plain yogurt," rather than "8 oz. yogurt." I like to be precise when I write my food down.

-Check out Deirdre from CA's handout which shows cooking/heating products such as HotLogic and rec. products such as ice packs, lunch bags, etc. If you are traveling by car, you can bring along a small crock pot, as some have done.

- In foreign countries, I always make sure I have a back-up plan if I go to a restaurant. There have been many times I've eaten out where it was not appropriate or I choose not to bring my own meal in to the restaurant (business dinners, socializing with my husband's work colleagues, etc.), I always carry my oil (in any country). If I have not been to the restaurant before I call first or ask the concierge at a hotel to call with the exact specifications of how I need my food prepared. Even if they say they can accommodate me, I still bring a back-up

protein. It is usually easy to order a salad (perhaps a double salad) and steamed veggies and augment the meal with my own protein and oil, if all else fails.

- Some people weigh and measure in a restaurant at all times. If you do that, make your life easier by bringing some baby carrots or celery sticks with you. Then if you are one or two oz. short of salad you can add up to the correct weight. In my opinion, I think it is fine to add the raw baby carrots (or some other raw vegetable) to complete the cooked vegetable, too. I would not do this at home, but in a restaurant situation I am doing my best to stay abstinent and committed. The food can be written down as 16 oz (or whatever your amount) of cooked and raw vegetables to fulfill the commitment). I once had a miserable restaurant meal when I chose to weigh and measure and it took me ordering two more times and an extra hour to get everything I needed at the restaurant to fulfill my committed amount. I vowed not to go through that again as it was stressful for me and wasn't the greatest experience for my husband, either. If you are weighing and measuring in a restaurant, bringing the raw veggies (and your oil, of course) is a good solution.
- In full disclosure, I was not raised in OA to weigh and measure in a restaurant. We did learn, though, that we could eat "abstinently" in a restaurant. When eating out, I can use my years of experience to "eyeball" my portion. The rest is not my food. When the protein arrives I carefully look at the size of it, assess what I believe is my amount, and put the rest on a side plate or give it to my husband. All the while I am asking God to give me clarity and honesty. Depending on my food plan for that meal, I can order a double salad and double steamed veggies and put to the side any amount that may be over. If the food happens to be a little less, our motto is "there is always another meal coming." I heard someone say years ago, about restaurant eating, "I never obsess about a bite less." In other words, I won't obsess about eating perhaps a little less, but definitely would obsess about whether I had eaten more than I should. I NEVER eat off of someone else's plate, even my husband's, to taste or to try to get my "eyeballed" full amount. I order my own and that is mine and that is it. It keeps the boundaries really defined, clear, clean, and honest for me. Personally, eating off anyone's plate is a slippery slope and I don't want to take that step. And, quite frankly, my husband should have the chance to eat vegetables, too! There are things I do and don't do. Also, I don't eat anything at a restaurant that I wouldn't eat at home. I tell the waitstaff exactly what I need (and this has been preceded by a phone call before I arrived where I have asked to speak with the manager to ask if they can accommodate my needs) and ask them to prepare the food in the following way:

"Please no seasonings, spices, sauces, oil, or breading on proteins...just plain protein ("Naked" as my dear friend always says :). Please bring me a raw salad without croutons, cheese, nuts, dressing, or anything cooked. Just plain raw. Can you please give me a double order of steamed vegetable with no seasonings, spices, sauces, oil, or butter."

- I eat my meal all together, so I ask for the salad to be brought out with the meal. If they forget, I just sit it in front of me and wait till my whole meal arrives. I bring my own salad oil and my weighed and measured fruit which I consume right after the main meal. It could be a long time before dessert and coffee for everyone else comes, so I don't wait for others to have or not have dessert to eat my fruit.

-I do not eat standing up in social situations or at home. I have done anecdotal “research,” of sorts, in program. Every time I hear of someone breaking their abstinence by popping food in to their mouth while cooking or shopping I ask them a few questions:

1. Do you ever eat your weighed and measured food or any food while standing?
2. Do you pick up food that is already weighed and measured and put it in your mouth while weighing and measuring the rest of your meal?
3. Do you put items of weighed and measured food in your mouth while walking it to the table?
4. Do you get up so often during a meal that it is hard to tell whether you really sat down and ate it?
5. Do you leave part of your food in the fridge or in the oven while you are eating other parts of the meal and hop up and down to get it?

Everyone I’ve talked to who has broken their abstinence with an unconscious popping of food in to their mouth has said yes to one or more of those questions. The moral of the story is: Don’t eat while standing up! I visualize a rubber band that is so taut it keeps my hand from reaching my mouth while standing. Also, put all your food in front of you before you sit down to eat so that you are not bouncing up and down and putting yourself at risk for forgetting parts of your meal.

#### DISCLAIMER:

The next bit of information may not be for everybody, but is a well worn and tested practice for many of us who have been in the following situations: backpacking and hiking trips, taking plane trips that last long hours across several time zones with stops through customs (where all fresh foods will be confiscated) to get on another plane, being in very unpredictable situations in non-English speaking countries where it is hard to negotiate every meal, and being in countries where you can’t eat anything fresh because of parasites and bacteria in the soils. When I am in any of the above situations I always keep the following meal as a back-up or planned meal, especially for long days of travel:

3 oz. of nuts

3 oz. of dried fruit

Calorically, this will cover every need for a breakfast, lunch, or dinner meal. Some smaller folks may lower the amount of nuts to two oz. Whatever amount you choose with your sponsor, commit that and follow it. Having this meal with me means that I will never have to break my abstinence by missing a meal. Also, dried fruit and nuts are not considered raw foods for declaration through customs. I often buy the one ounce boxes of raisins and will have the nuts I weighed prior to departure. It can take 36 hours of travel to get to some countries. On one trip I made there was a stop and disembarkation at six hours in to the trip where all raw vegetables and fruits would have been confiscated in customs before getting on the next plane. This option has allowed me to always have a planned, weighed, and measured meal no matter what the situation.

- I do not rely on airline food in any class. It is too unpredictable. I always bring my own food.

-Wherever I go, I am always having to explain to someone, somewhere, why I do what I do with my food. I don’t have to give my life story at a restaurant. But, when traveling with or eating at other’s homes it is helpful for me to tell a little bit about what I do and why. I have learned that people take their cues from me about this OA program. If I tell no one and covertly do my food

like it is a criminal organization they think that I am a little strange around the food. If I apologize for it or am embarrassed about it they feel uncomfortable. If I tell them that this is what my sponsor makes me do they wonder who those people are and want to rescue me from this horrible cult. So I tell them I had a very painful past with food and have lost 120 pounds through working this OA program. I note that what seems restrictive to others, has been my salvation and the very best thing that has ever happened to me! People can't argue with that! If anyone attempts to make arguments about flour and sugar I just let them know i'm allergic, politely listen and say nothing. But they can't argue about how great it makes me feel and how it has transformed my life. The most frequent response is: "Good for you! You do whatever you need to do to be well." This provides the opportunity for me to say that I can handle or bring my own food. I usually say..."You are cooking for the masses, so it is most likely simpler for you and easier for me to bring my own food." That usually works out great. Sometimes hosts insist on preparing food for me and that has worked out great, at times and other times not. Hosts usually opt, though, for me to do what I need to do and prepare or bring my own food. Of course, always have a back up plan if someone is planning to cook for you. The most important part, though, of me sharing what I do is that I never know who might be helped. There are people in program today because I was willing to share what I do in a social situation. That is a gift and blessing.

### **The Most Important Note on Travel:**

It is **a lot of work** to eat weighed and measured food when traveling. It requires total commitment. "Remembering when," meaning what it was like for me when I was in the food, is an essential element of maintaining the mindset that is necessary to persevere in these practices while on the road. I firmly believe that I can go anywhere and do anything abstinely. However, I have to run every scenario through the grid of "does this support my abstinence?" If there is any situation that I feel that will be too hard to stay abstinent, I either eat before or after, stay behind, or bring my own food.

The rigors of travel can often seem too much for those new in recovery. The reason for that is that I really couldn't see how sick I was till I started getting better. The longer I am in recovery, the more I see how desperate I was in the food and how much better life is when I do every part of the program and 12 Steps. My core belief is this: every action I take to maintain abstinence is not a burden, but a gift. Those newer in recovery are still developing these new beliefs. In the Chapter to the Agnostics, pg. 50 it says "thousands of men and women...flatly declare that since they have come to believe in a Power greater than themselves, to take a certain attitude toward that Power, and to do certain simple things, there has been revolutionary change in their way of living and thinking." The newcomer is on a journey to believe that all of what we do here in OA is worth it. In light of that, if you are new in OA and can delay travel (particularly international travel) until you get some time of abstinence and working the program under your belt, you will serve yourself well. Experience is the best teacher.

I came in to OA in 1978 and with God's grace and help, have maintained continued abstinence since 1984. Being in OA has not limited my life, it has made it larger, fuller, more loving, and fruitful. OA is my "wheelchair" that gets me places. Yes, I have a disability with food...it truly is a physical, mental, and spiritual illness. But if I do all the tools, disciplines, and the 12 steps, I can go anywhere and do anything that God has for me. In order to do that, though, I have to get the food right... I pray that these tips will help you do just that... Happy Travels!