

EATING DISORDERS

There are three main types of eating disorders:

ANOREXIA NERVOSA – Characterized by severe weight loss due to starving oneself or going to the extreme of eating as little as possible. Anorexia is often accompanied by excessive exercising and obsession with body image.

BULIMIA NERVOSA – Characterized by being normal weight or overweight with frequent binge eating followed by self-induced vomiting. Other symptoms include abuse of laxatives and diet pills.

EDNOS (EATING DISORDER NOT OTHERWISE SPECIFIED) – Eating disorder that does not meet the full criteria of anorexia or bulimia. An example would be binge eating, which is characterized by episodes of compulsive overeating to comfort oneself during stressful times, often followed by extreme dieting.

MYTHS	TRUTHS
Only teenage girls get eating disorders	Although girls in their teenage years are more often affected by eating disorders, anyone at any age can develop an eating disorder.
Anorexics do not eat junk food	Even though anorexics eat very little, they sometimes will binge eat on junk food, or if they allow themselves to only have so many calories per day, they may count a piece of candy within those calories allowed.
Bulimics always vomit after eating	Not all bulimics vomit after eating. May also abuse laxatives or diuretics, exercise or fast to keep their weight under control.
You cannot die from an eating disorder	Some anorexics and bulimics die every year. They can die of a heart attack or other health problems.
men with eating disorders are gay	Fewer men than women get eating disorders. Homosexual men do have a higher incidence of eating disorders than heterosexual males, however, not all men with eating disorders are gay.

TREATMENT FOR EATING DISORDERS

Remember that eating disorders are a mental illness! It is not your fault you have an eating disorder — you don't have to suffer alone! Eating disorders are a complex emotional problem and may require a range of professional treatments for successful recovery.

MEDICAL TREATMENT – Medication may be helpful for some people who have bulimic symptoms, but its use should be combined with psychological therapy and nutritional support. Usually, medication is not prescribed for anorexia nervosa.

NUTRITIONAL COUNSELLING – It is important to get the help of a nutritionist or dietician as they will teach you how to plan your meals and control portions and calories. They will also be able to discuss better eating habits and how to select healthier foods.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COGNITIVE THERAPY – Therapy should include improving self-esteem and learning new coping strategies for stress and problem solving.

I HAVE AN EATING DISORDER - WHAT DO I DO?

SOME SECRETS KILL!

If your eating disorder is a big secret, you can't overcome it until you admit you have it.

If you are struggling with an eating disorder you are not alone!

Do not feel ashamed about asking for help, it doesn't make you a failure! It is not your fault you have an eating disorder. Remember it's not like you are asking for the other person to fix you, you just need someone to talk to ... so let them listen! They will feel proud that you were able to confide in them.

Now with the support of your friend, you should seek professional help from your family doctor or counsellor. The counsellor will help you deal with any underlying issues that are causing the eating disorder and also help you work towards developing healthy eating habits and a more positive outlook on life.

HOW TO PREVENT EATING DISORDER RELAPSES

The first thing to do to prevent relapse is to recognize the triggers, in order to better prepare yourself on how to deal with stress.

HERE ARE COMMON TRIGGERS TO BE AWARE OF:

- Exam time
- Relationship breakups or problems
- Pressure from parents to make better grades, etc.
- Death of a close friend or family member
- Overloaded with work or tasks
- Fear of not being good enough
- Facing past trauma
- Recent trauma

Upon recognizing the triggers, it is important you make a plan and learn coping strategies for the next time you are faced with one of the triggers; this will help you avoid falling into relapse. It would also be wise to read about stress management techniques, as discussed earlier in the book.

SIGNS OF RELAPSE INCLUDE:

- Skipping meals
- Feeling guilty after eating
- Feeling fat or that nothing looks good on you

- ☹ Weighing yourself everyday
- ☹ Feeling sad or hopeless
- ☹ Counting calories obsessively
- ☹ Exercising constantly
- ☹ Looking in the mirror often
- ☹ Believing you'd feel better if you were thin

You need to talk to someone! You may feel you are the only person with these feelings and that you are alone, but you're not! Do not beat yourself up; relapse is very common, especially with students feeling the stresses of university or college life. You must tell yourself that no one is perfect and relapse is a normal part of recovery. It is important that you keep friends and support close during difficult times and take time out for yourself every day. It is essential that you believe in yourself and that you will recover. If you constantly punish yourself and believe you will never recover then you won't — so think positive!

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND

If you suspect your friend has an eating disorder, you should encourage him/her to seek professional help.

Try to get your friend to open up and talk about their feelings, but do not focus discussion around food or enable their behaviour. Let them know you are concerned without forcing anything on them or laying blame.

Here are a few other tips to consider before approaching your friend:

- ⇒ Focus on feelings, not on weight and food.
- ⇒ Stay positive; the best influence is a positive one.
- ⇒ Express your concerns; they will feel more willing to open up to you.
- ⇒ Do not comment on how they look, it will only reinforce their obsession with body image.
- ⇒ Don't nag about their eating behaviour, they will only become more secretive and ashamed.
- ⇒ Be supportive and compassionate as a friend without judgment.

- ⇒ Remember the person has a disease; it does not define who they are.
- ⇒ Encourage your friend to get help.
- ⇒ Be patient; it takes time for someone to admit they need help and they cannot be rushed or forced.
- ⇒ Educate yourself about the disorder to help understand it.

 *CHECK THESE OUT:*
<http://www.edap.org>
<http://mentalhelp.net>
<http://www.gurze.com>

~~ Learn from Karen's story ~~

Ever since I was eight years old I can remember thinking I was fat. I always worried about my chubby legs showing in shorts. My secret obsession stayed with me for years. Then when I was just 13, all the girls started getting bikinis for the beach. I had to do something quick or else my chubby legs would be out for the world to see. What could I do? I was a wreck! I thought about wearing a long shirt, but I couldn't find a shirt long enough. So I took diet pills and tried everything from continuous exercise, throwing up and starving myself.

I constantly weighed myself and became obsessed with hiding my body. This continued for a couple years and it seemed to go unnoticed. Then one day in gym class, a couple of friends and I got in trouble for trying to hide out in the change room instead of going to class. Anyway, the teacher made us do push-ups, sit-ups and jumping jacks. I thought it was great because I could get a real workout. My friends thought I was nuts because we were supposed to be getting punished. I never ate that day and after a half hour, I fainted. I never told anyone I hadn't eaten and luckily the teacher never told my parents, so I continued with my secret obsession.

What changed the situation?

I was 19 and it still never occurred to me that I was thin. My family and friends nagged me for being thin, but I thought they were just exaggerating and trying to make me feel good. Until one day when I went out to the bar with my friends. I thought I was looking hot until a guy walked by me and said, "go eat." Then when I went into the bathroom I overheard some other girls talking about how skinny I was. At first I thought they were jealous, but then from a distance I caught a glimpse of myself in a mirror and it was as though I was looking at someone else. Part of me was happy that I saw thin legs, but another part of me was in complete shock and I felt broken and sad. So I went and got help from the doctor and have learned what it means to truly be healthy.

It's been a few years and I work out regularly and even eat McDonald's once in a while. I feel better than I ever have. I even wear a bikini on the beach and am not afraid of anyone seeing my new little love handles. Body image still weighs on my mind a little sometimes, but I try to avoid stress and keep a healthy mindset.

My advice to someone with an eating disorder:

Know you are beautiful just as you are, inside and out. Try to think beyond body image and why you really are so unhappy. Life is too short so do what you love. Keep close friends nearby and know that people care about you. And most importantly TELL SOMEONE!