



... because health matters!

Nutrition Matters

March 2000

A Publication of the Peterborough County-City Health Unit

Eating Disorders **How To Spot Them - How To Help - What To Do**

An estimated 60,000 Canadians suffer from either bulimia, anorexia or both eating disorders.

The sooner an individual can be treated for an eating disorder, the shorter the treatment period.

Be aware of the high risk groups and early warning signs of eating disorders. You may be able to help prevent an eating disorder from developing or stop it early.

People Who May Be At High Risk For An Eating Disorder Include Two or More Of The Following Characteristics:

- Females - age 12-25.
- Women in careers which place emphasis on a thin body (i.e. dancers, models).
- Women under strong pressure to achieve (i.e. medical students and competitive athletes).
- Having a parent or sibling with an eating disorder.
- A history of alcoholism or depression in themselves or in their family.
- Having been overweight in the past.
- Having chronic diseases such as insulin dependent diabetes mellitus which require patients to focus on nutrition.
- A history of sexual abuse.

Warning Signs Of An Eating Disorder:

- Weight loss or changes in weight.
- Frequent weighing.
- Excessive calorie counting and dieting.
- Claims of "feeling fat" when weight is normal or low.
- Feelings of guilt or shame about eating.
- Hoarding or hiding food or stealing money/food to support binges.
- Use of laxatives, diuretics and enemas.
- Secretive vomiting - e.g. heading for the bathroom right after a meal.
- Moodiness, irritability, depression and inflexibility.
- Low self-esteem and intense need for perfection.
- Withdrawal from and intolerance to friends and family.
- Oversensitivity to criticism.
- Thinking in extremes - e.g. "If I'm not thin, I'm obese."
- Irregular menstruation.
- Chronic fatigue, constipation, stomach ache, sore throat.

If You Suspect An Eating Disorder - What Can You Do?

- Discuss your concerns with a professional (physician, social worker, nurse, or dietitian).
- Talk to the individual and let her know you are concerned and willing to help.
- Be compassionate and open. Explain your concerns about her health, don't focus on weight or body size.
- Let her know how you may be able to help (providing reading material, going to see the physician or school nurse with her).
- Encourage the individual to see a physician and to be honest about her eating behaviour.
- Expect to be rejected at first. It's scary to admit that you have a problem that is out of control. Leave her with the impression that you think the situation is serious and that you will be there for her.
- Know your limits. Don't try to offer "therapeutic" advice. These eating disorders are complicated, dangerous, difficult to treat, and require a whole team approach to treatment.

Don't:

- Be judgmental or accusatory in confronting the individual as they already have low self-esteem.
- Scold or plead with the individual to gain weight or eat.

- Give up when the individual comes up with several reasons for avoiding treatment.
- Be pushy. Be understanding but persistent, in attempting to get help. The individual may need some time to understand the seriousness of the situation.

Prevention Makes Sense

We need to discourage children and teens from being pre-occupied with their weight. We can:

- Help them feel good about themselves by focusing on internal qualities and skills.
- Emphasize physical activity and healthy eating.
- Explain how there is range of healthy weights instead of an "ideal weight."
- Help those with poor self-esteem get counselling.
- Teach them how to cope with stress in relationships and performance.
- Set an example by not dwelling on our own weight.

For Further Information contact:

- National Eating Disorder Information Centre, Toronto General Hospital
200 Elizabeth Street
Toronto, Ontario, M5G 2C4
(416) 340-4156
- Women's Health Care Centre
69 George Street N.
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