



EATING DISORDERS &



MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS



National Eating Disorders Association

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Medical professionals are in a unique position to recognize and offer assistance regarding a patient's eating and weight concerns. Identifying at-risk patients and intervening early can improve treatment outcomes and save lives. Learn more about eating disorders, incorporate screenings into your practice, and educate others on eating disorders signs and symptoms.

WHAT ARE EATING DISORDERS?

Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, and OSFED (other specified feeding or eating disorder), are complex medical and psychiatric illnesses that can have serious consequences for health, productivity, and relationships. They are bio-psycho-social diseases caused by both genetic and environmental factors and are not fads, phases, or lifestyle choices.

Eating disorders are marked by extreme emotions, attitudes, and behaviors surrounding weight and food issues. In the United States, 20 million women and 10 million men suffer from a clinically significant eating disorder at some time in their life. These disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness and can become very serious, chronic, and life-threatening if not recognized and treated appropriately. The earlier a person seeks treatment, the greater the likelihood of physical and emotional recovery.

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS FOR AN EATING DISORDER?

- In general, behaviors and attitudes indicating that weight loss, dieting, and control of food are becoming primary concerns.
- Evidence of binge eating, including disappearance of large amounts of food in short periods of time or finding wrappers and containers indicating the consumption of large amounts of food.
- Evidence of purging behaviors, including frequent trips to the bathroom after meals, signs, and/or smells of vomiting or presence of wrappers or packages of laxatives or diuretics.
- Excessive, rigid exercise regimen—despite weather, fatigue, illness, or injury, the compulsive need to “burn off” calories taken in.
- Withdrawal from usual friends and activities.
- Eating disorders can affect anyone, regardless of weight or size. Weight stigma can contribute to missed opportunities for diagnosis.

HOW CAN EATING DISORDERS AFFECT YOUR PATIENTS?

As with many illnesses, eating disorders have serious health effects that, gone untreated, may lead to lost productivity and long-term medical problems. Medical complications of eating disorders may include, but are not limited to:

ANOREXIA NERVOSA	BULIMIA NERVOSA	BINGE EATING DISORDER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heart failure• Osteoporosis• Muscle loss and weakness• Kidney failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heart failure• Gastric rupture• Tooth decay• Peptic ulcers and pancreatitis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heart disease• Type II diabetes mellitus• Gallbladder disease• High cholesterol

IT'S TIME TO TALK ABOUT IT

Early intervention saves lives, and our online screening only takes three minutes.

Make this screening tool available for patients:

www.myneda.org/screening

HOW CAN MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS HELP?

1. EDUCATE YOURSELF

Anorexia and bulimia are the best-known eating disorders, but you should also be aware of the signs and symptoms of other eating disorders, including binge eating disorder (BED), Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorder (OSFED), and Avoidant-Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID).

Eating disorders courses and conferences may offer continuing education credits relevant to your field. Find ED conferences at www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/find-event. You may also find relevant online continuing education courses.

The American Academy of Pediatrics provides office-based, evidence-informed guidelines for pediatricians on the prevention of both eating disorders and obesity: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/08/18/peds.2016-1649>

DID YOU KNOW?

Help-seeking decreases significantly when people are not aware of the options available to them.

(Ben-Porath, 2002; Friedman, 2009; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2006; Gould, 2007)

2. CHECK YOUR MESSAGING

- Provide balanced education about nutrition and physical activity.
- Encourage general health and wellness rather than focusing on weight. Over-emphasis on weight can be counterproductive for a patient susceptible to body image concerns and disordered eating.
- Take a look at your office, considering charts, magazines, and dietary warnings on display: what messages are you sending about weight?

3. PROVIDE RESOURCES

- Consider keeping a list of local eating disorders specialists available for your patients: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/find-treatment.
- On your webpage, link to the NEDA website, www.nationaleatingdisorders.org, and the online eating disorder screening: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/screening.
- Provide online and in-person access to NEDA's Toolkits for parents, educators, and coaches and trainers: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/toolkits.

NEDA HELPLINE

The National Eating Disorders Helpline offers treatment options & resources. Share this information with your patients so that they can reach out when they are ready.

www.myneda.org/helplinechat

(800) 931-2237

Crisis Line: Text NEDA to 741741

4. SCREEN AND INTERVENE

Early intervention and treatment are the best measures to encourage recovery. Incorporate questions about eating and exercise behaviors into your patient interviews. Patients may not disclose immediately, but sustained interest may encourage future disclosures. Several screening instruments, such as the SCOFF, can be easily integrated into your practice. You can share NEDA's online screening tool with your patients: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/screening.

As a medical professional, you are uniquely situated to identify early signs of an eating disorder, and to instill in your patients healthy attitudes about food and weight. Encourage screenings, promote wellness over weight, and educate yourself on the signs and symptoms of eating disorders.

INFORMATION FOR DENTISTS

Changes in the mouth are oftentimes the first physical signs of an eating disorder. The harmful habits and nutritional deficiencies that often accompany disordered eating can have severe consequences on one's dental health. It is important to know the early warning signs of disordered behaviors, as well as how to initiate a conversation about treatment options with your patient.

HOW DO EATING DISORDERS AFFECT DENTAL HEALTH?

- Without proper nutrition, gums and other soft tissue inside the mouth may bleed easily, individuals may experience chronic dry mouth, the glands that produce saliva may swell, gums may become red and swollen, and lips may become reddened, dry, and cracked.
- Insufficient intake of calcium, iron, vitamin D, and B vitamins may lead to tooth decay and gum disease. Insufficient iron can foster the development of sores inside the mouth. Insufficient vitamin B3, or niacin, can contribute to bad breath and the development of canker sores.
- A frequent binge-and-purge cycle may lead to enlarged salivary glands.
- Frequent vomiting may erode tooth enamel, making teeth brittle, translucent, and weak. In extreme cases the pulp can be exposed and cause infection, discoloration, or pulp death. This will cause hypersensitivity in the teeth at various levels, including severe, debilitating pain. The edges of teeth often become thin and break off easily. Teeth may appear diminutive and misshapen, causing bite collapse and prematurely aging the face.
- Degenerative arthritis within the temporomandibular joint in the jaw is a dental complication often associated with eating disorders. Symptoms may include pain in the joint area, chronic headaches, and problems chewing and opening/closing the mouth.
- Purging behaviors may be indicated by redness, scratches, and cuts inside the mouth, particularly on the soft palate. Cuts and/or bruises on the knuckles may also indicate purging behaviors.

HOW DO I DISCUSS MY CONCERNS WITH MY PATIENTS?

If you suspect your patient may be engaging in disordered eating, it's important to address the issue in a sensitive, empathetic manner, and to listen to their responses with compassion and without judgment.

- Alert the entire medical/dental team of your concerns.
- Indicate to the patient that you observed something (e.g., the condition of the teeth) that may relate to a nutritional imbalance. Gently ask the patient to describe their routine diet.
- Pose specific questions: Are you getting enough potassium? Protein?

When or if the patient opens up about their eating habits and concerns, be sure to treat them with respect and understanding—not sympathy. Let them know that your team can and will help at a highly professional level—or, if your team is unable to effectively address their concerns, refer them to a provider with appropriate expertise.

THANK YOU

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