

# Eating Disorder Recovery & Support Strategies

Learn how to help yourself or a loved one through disordered eating.

## 1 Recognize the warning signs.

Like many medical conditions, the sooner one identifies and begins to treat an eating disorder, the better chance for successful recovery. Because there are so many different types of eating disorders, there are also many different symptoms. These are some behaviors that may indicate a problem:

- Preoccupation with weight, body size/shape, food, calories, or dieting
- Skipping meals, eating small amounts of food, or eating large amounts of food quickly
- Discomfort eating around others
- Noticeable fluctuations in weight
- Gastrointestinal issues and/or menstrual irregularities
- Extreme mood swings and/or withdrawal from usual friends and activities
- Difficulty concentrating, sleep problems, or dizziness upon standing

## 2 Voice your concerns.

There is no shame in acknowledging an eating disorder or other mental health condition. If you are concerned about your eating patterns, or are concerned about the eating patterns of someone close to you, talk with your doctor, a mental health professional or an eating disorder expert. Open up to a trusted friend or family member or offer to listen. Speaking with someone can help.

## 3 Know what to say.

If you're struggling with disordered eating, having support along your recovery journey can help. In addition to the support provided by medical and mental health professionals, friends and family can be equally important in this journey. When speaking with friends and family, consider sharing your behaviors and feelings to the extent you feel comfortable and letting them know how they can best support you. You may want a compassionate listener, someone to help you problem solve or someone to help you find treatment options.

If you're concerned that someone close to you may be struggling with disordered eating, start by educating yourself and then asking for some private time to talk. Focus on the behaviors you have personally observed and use "I" statements. Try to stay calm and stick to the facts, without sounding judgmental or accusatory. For example, you could say, "I have seen you run to the bathroom after meals, and I'm worried you might be making yourself throw up."

## 4 Know what *not* to say.

Avoid making overly simplistic suggestions — to someone else or yourself, such as "You have to stop doing that." This can leave the person feeling frustrated, defensive, and misunderstood. It's also important to avoid threatening statements, such as "If you keep doing this, our friendship is over." Remain caring and understanding in your conversations — when talking with someone else or when using self-talk in your head.

## 5 Seek professional help.

Many people with disordered eating require professional help. Ask your primary care doctor for a referral to a mental health professional with experience in eating disorders, contact your health insurance or your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). In addition, the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) operates a free, confidential [Helpline](#) to offer support and help you find treatment options.