

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND WITH AN EATING DISORDER

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF AN EATING DISORDER?

(Not all persons display all symptoms)

- Preoccupation with food
- Depression
- Abuse of laxatives, diet pills, water pills
- Refusal to eat, except for tiny portions
- Vomiting
- Denial of hunger
- Distorted body image (i.e., sees self as fat when actually thin)
- Absent or irregular menstruation in women
- Excessive exercise
- Frequent binge eating
- Fear of losing control
- Self-esteem based on being thin
- 20% or more weight loss
- Fear of gaining weight

HOW CAN I HELP SOMEONE WITH AN EATING DISORDER?

- Think carefully of the best way to approach your friend
- Be specific--discuss eating behaviors you notice
- Focus on physical and mental health, not on weight
- Be gentle, but persistent in encouraging your friend to seek help
- Confront out of concern--avoid blaming
- Encourage your friend to find books and articles to read
- Offer to attend an eating disorders support group and/or first counseling session
- Consult a professional for advice on getting help
- Assume you will have to approach your friend several times
- Pick a time to talk when you are feeling calm and will not be interrupted
- Use "I" statements to convey your concerns

An EATING DISORDER is not simply a problem with weight or food. It is actually an attempt to use weight control and food intake to solve underlying emotional conflicts or difficulties that have little to do with weight or food.

WHAT ARE REALISTIC GOALS I CAN ACCOMPLISH WHEN APPROACHING A FRIEND?

Opening the doors to discussion shows that you are willing to listen and support your friend.

Telling your friend why you are having this discussion and what you would like to see happen.

Helping your friend get information and help. This may include giving her information about available resources and helping her recognize the problem.

Realizing you can listen and be supportive, but you cannot change your friend's behavior. Trying to stop someone from bingeing, purging or starving is an unrealistic goal. This will most likely end up in a struggle for control and will only make matters worse.

*Source: Eating Disorders Task Force at Northern Illinois University
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RECOMMENDED READING

Making Peace With Food: Freeing Yourself from the Diet/Weight Obsession, by Susan Kano

Bulimia: A Guide to Recovery: Understanding and Overcoming the Binge-Purge Syndrome, by Lindsey Hall and Leigh Cohn

Fat is Not a Four-Letter Word, by Charles Roy Schroeder, Ph.D.

The Body Betrayed: A Deeper Understanding of Women, Eating Disorders, and Treatment, by Katheryn J. Zerbe, M.D.

Surviving an Eating Disorder: Perspectives and Strategies for Family & Friends, by Michelle Siegel, Ph.D., Judith Brisman, Ph.D., and Margot Weinshel, Ph.D.

Gurze Books: Eating Disorders Bookshelf Catalog, 1-800-756-7533

Full Lives: Women Who Have Freed Themselves from Food and Weight Obsessions, by Lindsey Hall

Body Trust: Undieting Your Way to Health and Happiness, by Gayle Hayes. 60 minute Video

Body Traps: Breaking the Binds That Keep You From Feeling Good About Your Body, by Dr. Judith Rodin

GETTING HELP EARLY IS THE KEY

If you know or suspect you know someone who has an eating disorder, you can contact:

Valley Mental Health
(435) 649-8347

Overeater's Anonymous
(801) 484-1442

For free information, referrals, bibliography, self-help groups, contact:

National ANAD (Anorexia Nervosa & Associated Disorders)
P.O. Box 7
Highland Park, IL 60035
(708) 831-3438