



Guide to Eating Disorders

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This package was created by Healthy U: Peer Health & Wellness at the University of Manitoba. We are a group of trained, non-judgmental, and confidential student health and wellness leaders on campus.

We provide outreach activities, workshops, and one-on-one support for our fellow students on a variety of health and well-being topics. Feel free to drop in to chat or pick up more information packages.

If you would like to request or attend one of our workshops or events, check out our website for details.

Eating Disorders

What is it?

Eating disorders are a group of mental illnesses that affect the way you feel about food, your body, and yourself. The three most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

Anorexia nervosa (anorexia) is an illness that affects how you perceive your body and how you eat. People with anorexia often feel that their body is much bigger than it actually is, or have an intense fear of gaining weight. They may also believe that they would be a better person if they weighed less.

To lose weight or maintain a low weight, people with anorexia eat very little, refuse to eat at all, or over-exercise. This can cause very serious health problems - in fact, anorexia nervosa is considered the most life-threatening mental illness.

Binge eating is when you eat a very large amount of food in a short period of time. The person often feels like they're out of control when they're eating. After the binge episode, the person often feels distressed, disgusted, guilty, or depressed. When this happens regularly it is known as **binge-eating disorder**.

When a person binge eats and then purges (tries to get rid of what they ate by forcing themselves to vomit or taking laxatives), this is known as **bulimia nervosa** (bulimia).

Similarly to anorexia, these people often see themselves as bigger than they are or believe they would be a better person if they were thin.

Bulimia is usually less visibly obvious than anorexia because the person doesn't typically lose as much weight. However, bulimia can also cause a lot of serious health problems.

Could I have an eating disorder?

- I'm always thinking about food, dieting, and my weight.
- I often avoid food, even when I'm hungry.
- I feel guilty when I eat.
- I am afraid of eating, or I feel like I'm not allowed to eat.
- I often feel out of control when I eat.
- I feel better when I don't eat.
- Skipping a meal makes me feel good or proud.
- I will never be happy unless I reach my ideal body weight.
- I rarely get my menstrual period.
- I often try to get rid of food I've eaten by purging.
- I experience physical signs that my body isn't getting enough nutrients, such as hair loss, dry skin, dizziness, or lack of energy.

If you relate to any of these statements, talk to your doctor or make an intake appointment with an eating disorder program.

Who does it affect?

While anorexia and bulimia are more commonly seen in women, they can affect anyone of any gender. There have been increasing numbers of gay men with eating disorders as well.

Binge-eating disorder is seen equally among men and women.

These disorders typically begin in the teenage years (sometimes as early as 12 years old), but can occur at any point in life. Eating disorders tend to run in the family, and it is believed that there are genetic components to it.

People with low self-esteem or poor coping methods (particularly for stress) have a higher risk of developing an eating disorder. It is especially common in people who have other mental illnesses as well. Restricting food or purging can give the person a sense of control, and may be a way of coping with stress or feelings of little control over their life. However, this is an ineffective way of coping and can quickly get out of control.

Dieting may seem harmless at first, but people who diet also have a higher risk of developing an eating disorder. Dieting often directly leads to binge-eating, and can be a slippery slope into an eating disorder.

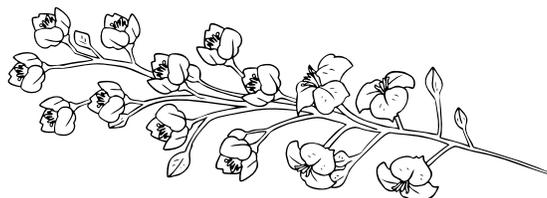
What can I do about it?

If you think you may have an eating disorder, the most important thing you can do for yourself is get help. Even if you don't have a diagnosed disorder, an unhealthy relationship with food or your body can cause damage to you mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Since there are many different aspects to eating disorders, you may need to seek help from several places. An eating disorder clinic (such as Women's Health Clinic in Winnipeg) can provide many resources such as nutritional help and support groups. It may also be helpful for you to seek counselling to explore the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours behind the disorder. Counselling can also be helpful for families of those with an eating disorder.

Depending on how advanced your disorder is, you may require medications or even hospitalization. Talk to your doctor about your illness and ask if there are any medical treatments you would benefit from.

Self-care is also extremely important. Be gentle and forgiving with yourself. Try practicing relaxation techniques, make sure you get enough sleep, and find healthy ways to cope with stress.



Resources

Women's Health Clinic

419 Graham Avenue
womenshealthclinic.org

This clinic hosts the Provincial Eating Disorders and Recovery program. They provide treatment, group programs, and nutrition counselling with Registered Dietitians. You do not need a referral or a diagnosis from your physician to access this program.

They also hold workshops which are open to anyone ages 16 and up.. You do not have to have an eating disorder to attend these workshops.

Please note that the Women's Health Clinic offers their eating disorder services to all genders.

For an intake appointment or more information:

In Winnipeg, call: 204-947-2422 ext. 137

Outside of Winnipeg, call toll-free: 1-866-947-1517 ext. 137

Email: edprogram@womenshealthclinic.org

Your family physician is another key resource. They can monitor your physical health and can refer you to other services.

The National Eating Disorder Recovery Centre

www.nedic.ca

Visit NEDIC's website for online information on topics such as self esteem, food and weight preoccupation, as well as a physician directory.

Stress Management

Student Counselling Centre - 474 UMSU University Centre*

Klinik - 204-784-4090

Calm in the Storm app (free on iPhone and Android) - in particular, try the self-compassion and the body scan exercises.

*There are no in-person services at the University of Manitoba currently.

Check the relevant websites for remote services and updates.