

PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN



FEBRUARY 2018

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: EATING DISORDER AWARENESS



Eating disorders are very common, but are dangerous mental illnesses. Eating disorders are not by choice, a matter of vanity or anyone's "fault," including parents. As a parent, you play an important role in assisting your son or daughter back to good physical and mental health.

What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder is a set of symptoms involving eating disturbances and excessive exercise. People with eating disorders come in all shapes and sizes. Many individuals with eating disorders are of average weight or are overweight. All eating disorders can lead to irreversible and even life-threatening health problems, such as heart disease, bone loss, stunted growth, infertility and kidney damage.

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The most common eating disorders are:

- **Anorexia nervosa** (involves food restriction)
- **Bulimia nervosa** (involves repeated restriction, bingeing and purging of food)
- **Binge eating disorder** (involves periodic food binges — unusually large amounts of food in short periods)

What to look for:

- Serious weight loss
- Obsession with body image
- Body loathing
- Perfectionism
- Excessive exercising
- Food avoidance
- Hiding and lying

If you are worried about your child's eating behaviors or attitudes, it is important to express your concerns in a loving and supportive way. Set aside time to have a private conversation with your child. Voice your concerns in a way that is honest and sympathetic. Explain why you are concerned.

Avoid commenting on appearance or weight. Instead, refer to specific situations and behaviors you have noticed and why they worry you. Be honest and use supportive "I" statements like "I am concerned, I hope you'll let me help you." or "I am worried, and I'm here for you. I want you to be safe." Be prepared for denial and resistance. Try to be calm, respectful, and non-judgmental.

Be patient and supportive. Do not give up if your child shuts you down at first. Make it clear that you care, that you believe in them and that you will be there in whatever way they need whenever they are

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ready. When they do open up. Be prepared to listen, even if you do not like what you are hearing at first.

Seeking treatment is the first step to recovery, and the sooner your child gets into treatment, the better the outcome. As a parent, being supportive and participating in treatment increases the chance of a full recovery.

RESOURCES:

- American Academy of Pediatrics, https://www.aap.org/en-us/professional-resources/Reaching-Teens/Documents/Private/Eating_disorders_handout.pdf
- Child Mind Institute, <https://childmind.org/downloads/Parents-Guide-to-Eating-Disorders-and-College-v1.pdf>
- Help Guide, <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/eating-disorders/helping-someone-with-an-eating-disorder.htm>

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