

What Can You Do to Help Prevent Eating Disorders?

- ★ Learn all you can about anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder. Genuine awareness will help you avoid judgmental or mistaken attitudes about food, weight, body shape, and eating disorders.
- ★ Discourage the idea that a particular diet, weight, or body size will automatically lead to happiness and fulfillment.
- ★ Choose to challenge the false belief that thinness and weight loss are great, while body fat and weight gain are horrible or indicate laziness, worthlessness, or immorality.
- ★ Avoid categorizing foods as “good/safe” vs. “bad/dangerous.” Remember, we all need to eat a balanced variety of foods.
- ★ Decide to avoid judging others and yourself on the basis of body weight or shape. Turn off the voices in your head that tell you that a person’s body weight says anything about their character, personality, or value as a person.
- ★ Avoid conveying an attitude that says, “I will like you better if you lose weight, or don’t eat so much, etc.”
- ★ Become a critical viewer of the media and its messages about self-esteem and body image. Talk back to the television when you hear a comment or see an image that promotes thinness at all costs. Rip out (or better yet, write to the editor about) advertisements or articles in your magazines that make you feel bad about your body shape or size.
- ★ If you think someone has an eating disorder, express your concerns in a forthright, caring manner. Gently but firmly encourage the person to seek trained professional help.
- ★ Be a model of healthy self-esteem and body image. Recognize that others pay attention and learn from the way you talk about yourself and your body. Choose to talk about yourself with respect and appreciation. Choose to value yourself based on your goals, accomplishments, talents, and character. Avoid letting the way you feel about your body weight and shape determine the course of your day. Embrace the natural diversity of human bodies and celebrate your body’s unique shape and size.
- ★ Support local and national nonprofit eating disorders organizations — like the National Eating Disorders Association — by volunteering your time or giving a tax-deductible donation.



**Don't Weigh Your Self-Esteem,
It's What's Inside That Counts!**



Eating Disorders Can Be Prevented!

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What is Eating Disorders Prevention?

Prevention is any systematic attempt to change the circumstances that promote, initiate, sustain, or intensify problems like eating disorders.

- ★ **Primary prevention** refers to programs or efforts that are designed to prevent the occurrence of eating disorders before they begin. Primary prevention is intended to help promote healthy development.
- ★ **Secondary prevention** (sometimes called “targeted prevention”) refers to programs or efforts that are designed to promote the early identification of an eating disorder—to recognize and treat an eating disorder before it spirals out of control. The earlier an eating disorder is discovered and addressed, the better the chance for recovery.

Basic Principles for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

- ❶ Eating disorders are serious and complex problems. We need to be careful to avoid thinking of them in simplistic terms, like “anorexia is just a plea for attention,” or “bulimia is just an addiction to food.” Eating disorders arise from a variety of physical, emotional, social, and familial issues, all of which need to be addressed for effective prevention and treatment.
- ❷ Eating disorders are not just a “woman’s problem” or “something for the girls.” Males who are preoccupied with shape and weight can also develop eating disorders as well as dangerous shape control practices like steroid use. In addition, males play an important role in prevention. The objectification and other forms of mistreatment of women by others contribute directly to two underlying features of an eating disorder: obsession with appearance and shame about one’s body.
- ❸ Prevention efforts will fail, or worse, inadvertently encourage disordered eating, if they concentrate solely on warning the public about the signs, symptoms, and dangers of eating disorders. Effective prevention programs must also address:
 - ★ Our cultural obsession with slenderness as a physical, psychological, and moral issue.
 - ★ The roles of men and women in our society.
 - ★ The development of people’s self-esteem and self-respect in a variety of areas (school, work, community service, hobbies, etc.) that transcend physical appearance.
- ❹ Whenever possible, prevention programs for schools, community organizations, etc., should be coordinated with opportunities for participants to speak confidentially with a trained professional with expertise in the field of eating disorders, and, when appropriate, receive referrals to sources of competent, specialized care.

