



Prevention of Eating Disorders

PARENTS DO NOT CAUSE EATING DISORDERS, HOWEVER THEY CAN BE VITAL PLAYERS IN HELPING THEIR LOVED ONE RECOVER FROM THIS DEBILITATING CONDITION.

Preventing eating disorders is much easier than curing them, and parents and carers are in the best position to do that work.

- Learn all you can about anorexia, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder. Learn too about the other types of eating disorders and how eating disorders affect boys and men too.
- A genuine understanding of these conditions will help you avoid poor and judgemental attitudes to food, weight and body shape. Actively discourage the notion that thinness, weight loss or muscularity are to be desired, and means happiness, whilst body fat, or weight gain are shameful, or implies laziness or worthlessness.
- Be a healthy role model. No matter what size or shape your body is, learn to live in it with acceptance. Work to be comfortable in it. Never criticise your appearance, this just teaches others to be overly concerned with externals and critical of their own bodies.
- Ditch the diets! Become an advocate for health at every size. Emphasise the importance of fit and healthy bodies, not thin bodies. The goal should be health and fitness, not thinness. They do not always go together.
- Encourage healthy eating not dieting.
- Become fully aware of the dangers of dieting.
- Negative comments about body can be hurtful and damaging to emerging or fragile self-esteem.
- Remember people are more than just bodies. Everyone has their own values, goals, dreams and abilities. Treat them with respect, just as you would want to be treated.
- Do remember that biologically, eating disorders are triggered by an energy imbalance i.e. consuming fewer calories that one expends, and is then perpetuated by malnutrition.
- Pay attention to changes in your loved one's eating habits. Even things that appear positive like 'eating only healthy foods' or 'going vegetarian' can be a sign that your loved one is beginning to become obsessed by food.
- Attend to good nutrition. Ensure that your child or adolescent is eating regular, substantial, nutritious and well balanced meals every day. Please do remember that you also encourage your loved one to eat dessert etc. too. Remember, there are no 'good or bad' foods.
- If your loved one is determined to diet, take them to see their G.P or a registered dietitian. This will help educate, and counteract the myth about 'good and bad' foods.
- Talk to your child about normal bodily changes expected at puberty. Getting the normal curves can mean 'getting fat' for some girls.
- Teach yourself and your loved one to become critical viewers of the media. Talk about the unrealistic expectations of beauty and body size created by the media.
- Refuse to buy fashion magazines that perpetuate unrealistic standards, write letters to advertisers.
- Praise and encourage others because of the abilities and skills they have not their appearance.
- There is some evidence to suggest that genetic factors can contribute to an eating disorder, so if you or a member of your family suffered from this condition, educate yourself further about all areas of prevention.