



You Oughta Know . . . About Eating Disorders in Females

Signs and symptoms of an eating disorder

Physical

- ▶ Sudden fluctuation of weight (loss or gain).
- ▶ Abdominal pain.
- ▶ Constantly tired, forgetful.
- ▶ Feeling faint, dizzy, cold.
- ▶ Lanugo hair (a fine, downy, white hair that grows on the body to regulate temperature).

Emotional

- ▶ Sudden change in attitude.
- ▶ Talks consistently about dieting, being or feeling "fat."
- ▶ Denies problem.
- ▶ Constantly asks for reassurance about appearance.

Behavioral

- ▶ Seems constantly moody.
- ▶ Wears baggy clothes, either to hide weight loss or to conceal body.
- ▶ Compulsive behavior, appears "on edge," talks a lot about food, carries food around, possessive about food.
- ▶ Avoids social functions where food is present.

- ▶ Suddenly stops eating around other people; always claims to have previously eaten.
- ▶ Ritualistic about food (cuts food into small pieces, takes a long time to finish meals, avoids food other people have bought or cooked).

What to do if you suspect a friend has an eating disorder

- ▶ Gather information about eating disorders from qualified sources (see websites on the next page).
- ▶ Confront your friend in a confidential setting; express concern in a loving and supportive way.
- ▶ If your friend admits to having an eating disorder, encourage her to get help and talk to a trusted adult (parent, school counselor, coach, teacher, pastor, rabbi, etc.).
- ▶ Avoid making comments about your body shape or size, food, dieting, or weight loss or gain.
- ▶ Try to avoid making situations awkward. Keep inviting your friend to social functions, even if she refuses to go.
- ▶ Set boundaries and remember that you are not responsible for your friend's eating disorder. You cannot fix it, but you can always be there for support.

Our thanks to our colleague Julia V. Taylor for the content of this handout.

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What to do if you have an eating disorder

- ▶ Tell somebody—a trusted adult, friend, or professional. You cannot heal from an eating disorder alone. Ask to talk when you both have some time and are not in a hurry.
- ▶ Practice what you are going to say. Write it down, say it out loud, or go over it in your head.
- ▶ Many adults do not understand eating disorders. Don't be discouraged if people are shocked, deny the problem, or get angry. Be proud of yourself for coming forward and remember that you deserve to be healthy and happy.
- ▶ Understand that eating disorders are not about food, size, weight, or shape. Preoccupations and obsessions about food and weight are merely symptoms. Ask for help from a qualified professional who has experience with eating disorders and body image concerns.
- ▶ Be honest about your needs. Eating disorders are difficult to treat, and you will need a lot of support. Ask for help and be specific about your needs.

For more information

The Something Fishy Website on Eating Disorders: www.something-fishy.org

National Eating Disorders Association: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

Eating Disorder Referral and Network Center: www.edreferral.com