



EATING DISORDERS IN TEENS

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT EATING DISORDERS IN TEENS?

THE TEENAGE YEARS (12–18) are a time of rapid physical, mental and social change and can present both opportunities and challenges. Some teens are able to manage this time of transition very well while others may struggle to adapt.

Teens who develop eating disorders are showing signs of a personal struggle.

All teens have worries and concerns. However, teens with an eating disorder may be experiencing worries and fears that intensify and progressively take over their lives.

They may be worried about not having friends, how to manage the demands of school and part-time work, their appearance, a family separation, dating, bullying, future plans, etc. These worries may cause them to feel that they are “not good enough” which may make them anxious, angry or sad. They may become stressed and feel they are losing their self-confidence and sense of control over their lives.

HOW DO TEENS COPE?

It is very natural for teens who feel anxious or stressed to seek ways to reduce their negative feelings and thoughts. Some positive coping strategies include participating in sports, creative arts or volunteer work. Each of these strategies can help reduce their stress and increase their self-esteem and resilience.

On the other hand, there are many coping strategies that may actually create more harm than good and interfere with a teen’s daily life, personal development and mental and physical health. Extreme dieting and the pursuit of thinness, along with alcohol and substance abuse or antisocial behaviours, are examples of unproductive and unhealthy strategies teens may choose to feel better, less anxious and more in control. Unfortunately, these behaviours usually cause more distress and isolation and may result in the development of eating disorders and/or addictions.

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF AN EATING DISORDER?

If they are not recognized and addressed, eating disorder behaviours can result in serious physical and emotional problems.



Here are some signs that your teen may be struggling with an eating disorder and needs immediate help:

- Irritability, depression and social withdrawal.
- Excessive preoccupation with calories, food or “healthy eating”.
- Frequent negative comments about their weight and shape.
- Restriction of food intake.
- Making excuses to avoid eating.
- Significant weight loss or weight gain (regardless of previous weight).
- Compulsive exercising.
- Frequently eating excessive amounts of food in a short period of time.
- Consuming food alone, at night or secretly.
- Using laxatives or diet pills.
- Going to the bathroom immediately after eating.

HOW TO HELP YOUR TEEN WITH AN EATING DISORDER

You know your teen better than anyone. If you notice unusual behaviours and are concerned your teen may have an eating disorder, your first step will be to talk to them. Encourage them to express their worries and concerns. Use “I” statements and let them know that you are aware they are struggling. For example, you may say: “I’ve noticed that you may be going through a rough time lately. I’m happy to listen or talk and see if I can help.”

Stay calm and avoid judging or blaming your teen. A teen who is struggling with an eating disorder may resist disclosing his or her behaviours or feelings. Let your teen know you care about them no matter what and you will support them through difficult times.

You can find out more about eating disorders and how to help your teen by checking out the links at the end of this information sheet.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF EATING DISORDERS IN TEENS

Eating disorders can be prevented if action is taken at the first signs of recurrent preoccupation with body weight and image.

Teens can learn healthy ways to cope with their worries and life challenges. Parents, schools and the community all have a role to play in building healthy coping skills that will help avoid eating disorders.

If the symptoms of an eating disorder are severe, medical treatment may be needed to reverse a physical condition that could otherwise become critical. If you notice that your teen’s mental and physical health is rapidly deteriorating, don’t hesitate to seek immediate help from your primary health care provider or community health care centre.

The majority of teens with eating disorders are able to recover with support from their family, friends and community. There are many resources available across Canada that can help you find reliable information and connect to your local resources.

WHERE CAN I FIND INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ABOUT EATING DISORDERS?

NATIONAL EATING DISORDER INFORMATION CENTRE (NEDIC)

www.nedic.ca

1-866-663-4220 or 416-340-4156 in Toronto

Category: National information resource centre and help line

NEDIC provides information and resources about eating disorders, helps individuals find local treatment and support and offers support through Canada's only national toll-free helpline. NEDIC holds a national database of service providers that work with eating disorders.

CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION (CMHA)

www.cmha.ca

Category: Raising awareness and providing resources on a national level

CMHA is a nation-wide, voluntary organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness.

EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (EDAC)

www.edac-atac.ca

Category: Canadian organization of professionals working in the field of eating disorders

EDAC is a Canadian organization whose mandate is to best serve the needs of those whose lives are impacted by eating disorders.

NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR EATING DISORDERS (NIED)

www.nied.ca

Category: Raising awareness and providing resources on a national level

NIED aims to increase awareness and education of the chronic situation facing those with eating disorders and their families in Canada.

FAMILIES EMPOWERED AND SUPPORTING TREATMENT OF EATING DISORDERS (F.E.A.S.T.)

<https://feast-ed.site-ym.com>

Category: Canadian task force of parents supporting parents and providing resources

F.E.A.S.T. is an international non-profit organization of and for caregivers of loved ones suffering from eating disorders. Their mission is to support, promote evidence-based treatment and advocate for research and education.

EATING DISORDER FOUNDATION OF CANADA (EDFC)

www.edfofcanada.com

Category: Support to community groups making progress in the field of eating disorders

The EDFC raises funds to support education, treatment, research and supportive housing and plays a leadership role in bringing local, provincial and national initiatives together.

ANOREXIA AND BULIMIA QUÉBEC

www.anebquebec.com

Category: Resources and information in English and in French for those suffering directly and indirectly from eating disorders

Anorexia and bulimia Quebec guarantees immediate, free professional support to people affected by eating disorders. All services are offered in French and in English.

THE LINK PROGRAM—NEW BRUNSWICK

www.programmelemaillon.com/en/index.php?cat=Welcome

Category: Provides assistance for individuals to access local services in French and English

The Link Program enables individuals with any kind of problem including eating disorders to access local help services through a Link Companion in New Brunswick.

To find community-specific information about eating disorders go to “Decision Tree” on the top menu bar of THE LINK Program web site and then choose your community.