

What is an Eating Disorder?

a glimpse from one who knows

An eating disorder is a controlling force that takes over a person's mind and life. It starts out small. Maybe an insecure childhood, maybe not feeling accepted with your friends, or maybe feeling like your life is so out of your control. Maybe simply feelings and struggles that you can't define, making you discouraged and vulnerable. No matter how it starts, it has the potential to consume you and destroy your life.

An eating disorder is the persistent voice in your head yelling that you are fat. It doesn't matter if you're extremely underweight, that nagging voice will still tell you that you're not skinny enough. You will look into the mirror and be overwhelmed by all the fat that you think you see. Those struggling with eating disorders are constantly comparing themselves with others, trying to determine who's skinnier. They engage in a lot of body checking, trying to decide whether they've gained any weight. What they find determines whether they have a good day or not.

An eating disorder controls your moods. If you're having a "skinny" day, you feel good. If it's a "fat" day, you feel bad. It makes you extremely insecure being around other people, because you feel as if they are judging you. You feel like others are skinnier than you, and therefore better and more successful. It takes away your enjoyment of social life, making that you can't enjoy hanging out with your friends if there's any food involved.

You are constantly thinking about food. Such as, "How can I avoid it?" "What can I eat that I'll be okay with?" "Can I make myself pass up this food I crave?" And for some there's the driving urge to binge - the more the better - and then get rid of it. And eating disorder brings a lot of shame. It makes you feel like hiding. Many will hide behind a sweater or loose-fitting clothing. Many people are obsessed with weighing themselves, but there are also those who are terrified of the scale, and need to learn to see their weight and accept it.

An eating disorder is an enemy that lives with you day in and day out. It's a monster that tells you that certain foods are okay and certain foods are forbidden. If you dare to eat a forbidden food, you feel awful - like the biggest loser. It causes some people to eat very slowly or pick at their food. It sets in place a bunch of rigid food rules, and brings lots of anxiety if you break them.

An eating disorder is the haunting voice in your head the insists you're a failure - not worth anything. It tells you that your value is determined by your size or the number on the scales. It's always telling you that you're not sick enough; you haven't been successful yet. And it tries to make you believe that you don't deserve (or need)

any help. It makes eating your meals and snacks feel like hard work. Sometimes it makes your stomach a churning ball of nerves, so that you feel you can't eat. Most of the time it makes the food sit heavy in your stomach so that you feel grossly full. It tells you that the food you've eaten is more than you can possibly be okay with, and you simply can't go on.

It strains relationships. Many people do not know how to respond to those with disordered eating. They feel powerless to know how to help, so they tend to back off. It takes brave people to stand by and support those with eating disorders.

Depression and eating disorders go hand in hand. It consumes your life until that's all you can think about. It may make the individuals withdraw into silence and loneliness. It produces an intense dread of the future. For some, it manifests itself through self-harm and others wish they could simply die and escape it all. Finding a way through looks hopeless.

So what hope is there? What can be done? Friends, your loved one with an eating disorder needs your support. You don't need to have an answer, just let them talk. Tell them that you may not understand, but you know it's very real to them. Assure them of the truth. They are not fat, and let them know how precious and valued they are. They may need someone to hold them accountable. Be there for them. Above all, **don't give up!** Most times those with eating disorders feel like there is no hope. They need you to hold onto that hope for them.

Recovery is a long, hard road. It requires much hard work. It means feeling the awful, yucky feelings, accepting you feel them, but clinging to the hope that they will pass. It means every meal, every snack, you have to eat whether you feel like it or not. It means getting up when you fall, and trying again. It means learning to accept yourself the way God made you, and opening your heart to the truth that you are special, precious and loved. It means believing that God has a beautiful plan and purpose for you. It means taking one step at a time on the path to a life that is better than you could ever imagine!

“As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and

at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud:

and he shall hear my voice.

He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me:

for there were many with me.”

Psalm 55: 16-18

Recovery

Reaching out to people

Eating even when it's hard

Coming to a facility for help

Opening my mind to new ideas

Enduring the yucky feelings

Remembering my value

Yelling back at the nasty voices in my head

-by a PMRC Resident

